

# HIGH FLIGHT

By RUTH DEWEY GROVES



*Romance dropped  
down upon "Jerry"  
right out of the sky*

DO YOU WANT ANOTHER GOOD STORY ? LOOK ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS WRAPPER FOR A LIST OF MORE THAN 500 TITLES-OF THE BEST RECENT COPYRIGHT FICTION IN POPULAR PRICED EDITIONS.

## HIGH FLIGHT

By RUTH DEWEY GROVES

Jerry Ray saw so much poverty and misery at home that she decided to marry for money in order to escape a life of penury such as her mother and friends endured. Her opportunity came when a young Croesus dropped out of the sky and fell at her feet. He offered his fortune but Jerry learned about love from Dan Harvey, an aviator, whose heart looped the loop when he saw Jerry.

The events that followed comprise the fast moving romance of Jerry's quick rise to stage success, her struggle with temptation, her crushing disillusion in the tragic hour at the end of her HIGH FLIGHT when she learns that the best of life is not composed of riches.

LOOK ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS JACKET



Ms. Sheila T Lambrinos  
425151 Irish Lake Rd  
RR 1  
Markdale ON N0C 1H0

# HIGH FLIGHT

1929 (1928)



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2014

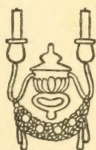
# HIGH FLIGHT

*By*

RUTH DEWEY GROVES

*AUTHOR OF*

*WHEN A GIRL LOVES, ETC.*



GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY  
N. E. A. SERVICE, INC.

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY  
RUTH DEWEY GROVES

# HIGH FLIGHT

## CHAPTER I

THE bag was empty!

But Jerry couldn't believe it. Again and again she thrust her hand into the felt folds, poking and digging in a space that could not long have concealed a pinhead.

Her roommate, powdering her nose before the golden oak dresser, heard her gasp and wheeled in alarm.

"What's the matter?"

"My money is gone!"

"No!" Myrtle stared at the open bag in Jerry's nerveless fingers as though it were poisonous. "Maybe it fell out. Let's look in the closet."

The search was a frantic one. Every inch of the dark cubicle was covered.

"I warned you not to leave it here," Myrtle said when at last they gave up. She was exasperated because she knew what the loss of the money would mean to Jerry Ray. When a girl refused to treat herself to a soda for weeks and weeks. . . . "Why didn't you give it to Mrs. Addison?"

She knew the answer to that too. If their landlady knew that one of them could save money they certainly would get that threatened raise in their room rent.

"I thought it would be all right for one night," Jerry sobbed.

The theft was fast becoming a reality to her. For nearly a year she had saved that money, dime by dime, quarter by quarter and dollar by dollar. It had been almost impossible to believe, when she opened the bag and found it gone, that it had been stolen, that it really was gone. Why, she had starved for it—for the chance it was to bring her.

It seemed sort of funny that only a few minutes ago she had run up the stairs ahead of Myrtle, who wasn't going to Atlantic City, tripping over the hole in the carpet before their door, as usual, but with an unusual song in her heart. As quick as that everything could change. The song was a dirge now.

Myrtle tried in vain to comfort her until George came. Then she had to go. George couldn't be kept waiting. Jerry lay on the bed, white and tense, her disappointment eating deeper into her consciousness as her thoughts traveled backward. Another year at the lace counter before she could have a vacation again. Another year of automats and self-service restaurants, of movieless Saturday nights and not even a late magazine to read.

Myrtle had argued heatedly over what she called Jerry's crazy idea. But Myrtle didn't know. Myrtle didn't want things the way Jerry wanted them. Myrtle Crane was content to look forward to a future with George in a three-room flat. Myrtle believed in love. Jerry didn't.

"I've seen enough of it," she said when Myrtle wanted to know "how she got that way." "I know what it did to my mother. It's just a snare."

Her mother in the hot kitchen at Marblehead . . . There was no gas in their neighborhood and the grocer on the next street was glad to give them boxes and crates—her father wouldn't buy oil when he could get sum-

mer fuel for nothing. And her mother's room under the sloping roof—hot in summer, cold in winter.

And her father and her brother Harry. Both of them hated work. Harry had married a cute little kid he met at a dance. Jerry had listened in silent anger to Doris's ravings about Harry. Harry had promised Doris love and romance.

Jerry twisted her lips in contempt as she dwelt on that year Harry and Doris had spent at home after their marriage. She could not forget Doris's disillusionment when she discovered that Harry was more interested in what he had to eat than in how she looked or what she thought of him.

But such a thing could never happen to her. Her mother's experience was enough. She had never heard her say one word against marrying for love, but Jerry had guessed at her bitter awakening.

Once her mother had confided to Jerry that she was the only beautiful thing in her life and in Jerry's heart had been born then and there a fierce resolve to compel beauty for her mother, to bring some luxury into her life.

She wanted, with a longing that had grown with her through the years, to rest her mother's hands, to see the callouses disappear and the broken nails mend. She wanted skillful fingers to rub out the furrows on her mother's brow, but above all she wanted to see those drooping shoulders lift and a light shine in the dull blue eyes.

And for this she had come to New York. She had told them frankly at home that she was coming to marry money. They laughed at her, all but her mother. She warned Jerry gravely against making a mistake.

But New York had disappointed Jerry. Rich men did not come seeking brides at Fane's department store.

She met a few boys, friends of George, but they were like the boys she had known at Marblehead, satisfied to have just a "job"—nothing else.

That would not do for Jerry. If you believed in love it was different—you must marry blindly. But if you were not a sentimental boob you could make your marriage a care. Jerry had read somewhere that marriage was a matter of propinquity. Being what she called intelligently interested in marriage she looked up propinquity in a dictionary and learned that it meant nearness in place or time.

If that was all there was to it why not benefit by it? Going around with boys who had nothing but love to offer, you would marry for love. For love! Jerry believed that most people knew more about it than a hen knows why she lays an egg. It was a nice word, but you might as well marry for stardust, or roses, or nectar, or anything else that sounds well.

But if you met only the "right" people you could pick out a man whose promises—if he didn't talk about love—were something besides wind. Jerry decided to give herself that chance. This was shortly after she came to New York.

The best way, she concluded, since the mountain didn't come to Mahomet, was to go to the mountain. A real mountain. That was the advantage of knowing that marriage was a matter of propinquity—you could choose your field. Jerry knew she appeared soulless to Myrtle, but then Myrtle was a fool, she thought. She wondered why people were so blind when all about them were the wrecks of love marriages.

She was not ashamed of her decision to marry money. She wasn't going to "sell" herself or anything like that. The man must be someone she could respect and like.

She saw no reason why marriage should be approached in a coy, oh-it-just-happened manner.

Myrtle had scoffed when she explained this. "Well, I'd rather marry George than a man I didn't love even if he had a million," she said.

Jerry had flared back at her. "It's George because propinquity didn't make it somebody else. . . ."

"A Vanderbilt or an Astor, huh?" Myrtle broke in. "Don't be so funny, Jerry. I got enough laughs out of you already. You don't owe me any more. Every time I think of you and your shadow strolling down the Boardwalk trying to pick up a billionaire I choke."

"You've got the wrong idea," Jerry had answered serenely. "I'm not going to Atlantic City to parade the Boardwalk."

"You don't expect to meet a Social Register guy in a second-class hotel do you?"

"I'm not going to a second-class hotel. Listen, Myrtle. What do you think I've been saving my money for? I'll tell you. I'm going to have a week in the best hotel in Atlantic City. The right clothes, the right place, and I know I'll find the right man."

Now, thinking over all the sacrifices she had made, the money she had wanted to send her mother and hadn't because it was to free them both from the ugly confines of poverty, Jerry felt weak and defeated.

The room was stifling hot, filled with the heat of the city's masonry that even the night could not entirely release. Jerry had let her mind train itself to picture the things she wanted for her mother and herself. Smooth beaches, roof gardens, the deck of a white and mahogany yacht—she had read of them, seen photographs of them, seen fleeting glimpses of them in the news reels.

If such places and things existed why should she not

aspire to them? Certainly the people who had them had not been content to want less, she reasoned.

Her room, by contrast with the things she had dreamed of, seemed doubly hot. And how she hated it—the jaundiced wall paper and thread-bare rug, the curtains that hung with a listlessness like her mother's movements.

Tired. That was it—the room was tired, perhaps tired of the stream of colorless tenants who came and went, their drab-patterned lives making no imprint. Tired, as her mother was tired of the years that came without event, unheralded, unsung. Flat, tedious years. Years like a gray soil that had put forth one blossom to justify its existence and then had gone on molding, dying.

Saving to lift her mother, by the only way she knew, into a more gracious world than this, had not been an unadulterated hardship. It had been thrilling to watch her savings account grow. Yesterday, when she had withdrawn it from the bank because she would have no time on Saturday to attend to it, she had felt like dancing out with it. What were sodas and shows then?

The risk of leaving it in her room overnight had seemed unavoidable. She was leaving on Sunday morning. She had worried a little over it . . . there had been a sneak thief in the house two years before, she had heard, but she was too elated over the prospect of what lay before her to think much of trouble.

Her new suit case was packed with lovely things. Not a faded or mended garment in it, such as filled her share of the limited drawer space in the mutually-used dresser.

She could see it now, from where she lay on the bed. Well, she had that much to show for her thrift. Some pretty clothes. Too bad she hadn't bought the evening dress here that she had planned to get in Atlantic City.

She had thought it would be exciting to shop there. She wondered what good the clothes would do her now.

She was still lying on the bed, fully dressed, when Myrtle returned. Myrtle was excited over something. Jerry supposed, without giving it much thought, that George had been making love to her.

"How about a little ice cream?" Myrtle asked, intending to treat. Jerry didn't want ice cream.

"Well, say, listen, Jerry, I've been thinking—you'll go camping with me now, won't you?"

Jerry didn't answer.

"Gee, you'll like it," Myrtle went on. "I was out there last summer, you know. I've got the tent and everything. Bella sold me her half of it when she got married. We used to camp together. George stored it in a garage for me this winter, but I didn't expect to use it. No fun camping alone. What do you say, let's run out to Glen Cove tomorrow and see about getting a site? Of course I should have let Mr. Barnes know before this, but he may be able to squeeze us in somewhere."

A flicker of interest passed over Jerry's face. Myrtle did not see it but she was sufficiently engrossed with her plans to go on without encouragement.

"There's always a swell crowd," she enthused; "and it isn't far from the beach. Come on, say yes. You'll be glad your roll was lifted when you meet some of the boys that camp there. Honestly, Jerry, you'd have had a dumb time all alone in Atlantic City."

Jerry did not feel like taking issue with her about that. It was all right to argue when she had a choice. But now if she refused to camp with Myrtle she would have to spend her vacation in town with nothing to do. She hadn't enough money left to pay her fare to her home and return.

Before they fell asleep she had promised to go with Myrtle. The decision eased her mind a little. She could go to Atlantic City next year. It was a long time to wait but . . . she was asleep.

They drove out to Glen Cove in George's battered little car, built mostly from junked automobiles. Jerry remarked the number of fine motors that purred swiftly past them on the highway. "Yeah, the North Shore of Long Island is lousy with millionaires," George informed her.

Myrtle gave Jerry a sly glance. "Not a bad hunting ground, kid," she said. "If you can get in."

"How did you happen to find a camp out there?" Jerry inquired, ignoring her suggestion.

"Why, this man Barnes has some land in the not-so-high-hat neighborhood that he's holding for speculation," Myrtle explained. "He rents the camp sites to pay his taxes. On a hot summer like this his place is always crowded. I hope we aren't too late."

But they were. The camp sites were all taken.

"Now what'll we do?" Myrtle wailed when Mr. Barnes gave her the bad news. He didn't know, but she asked him so many times, in such genuine distress, that he was driven to think it out for her.

"I'll tell you what I can do for you," he said at last, speaking a bit reluctantly. "I've got a house down near the shore that's empty, been empty for years. Being's I know you I can let you camp there. You'll have to boil the water and you'll have to keep quiet. I don't want any trouble with Mr. Carstairs."

"Who's he, Mr. Barnes?"

"Carstairs? Humph. He owns the place next door, and don't you go trespassing or get a gang hanging

around, because Carstairs and me are going to do business about that shore property some day. I'm doing this as a favor to you, young lady, and don't you forget it. The Carstairs neighborhood is no place for campers."

Myrtle turned up her nose. "Is that so? Well, how much will it delay our first hundred to hang up our hats in that sacred spot?"

"Twenty-five, the same as here. The water's free."

"What is it, salt?"

"It's a brook. Be sure you boil it."

"How far is it from anywhere?"

"Wait until I get my car,"—Mr. Barnes threw a glance at George's—"and I'll take you over to look at it."

"I hope we can walk back to camp; won't be any fun off by ourselves," Myrtle grumbled while they waited.

Fifteen minutes later she declared she couldn't think of camping at the old house.

"Why, we'll be buried here without a car," she exclaimed, aghast at the idea of solitude.

But now it was Jerry who urged. She was entranced with the place. A ramshackled old shingled house with a wide porch on one end, a grove of maples and a few towering oaks, looked like a cool green paradise to her.

She begged with good effect. Myrtle agreed to stay. George promised to deliver the tent and equipment. Mr. Barnes told them just where to put it so it wouldn't be conspicuous, but when George returned with it, much later in the day, the three pitched it where they willed, which was on the edge of the maple grove where the morning sun would wake them.

Jerry had almost forgotten her disappointment of the previous day. While George was away for the tent she and Myrtle had hitch-hiked to the nearest village and

bought a picnic lunch. When he got back they had it spread out in the shade, all except what hunger had compelled them to gobble up.

Myrtle thought they ought to apologize for having eaten, but she stopped when Jerry gave her a look. It was nearly two o'clock. They had breakfasted at seven. Why should they get a headache? she asked when Myrtle had said they ought to wait for George. "Well, it would be more hospitable," Myrtle argued. "George will be starved when he gets here."

"Will he?" Jerry replied with the twisted smile she used when speaking of men.

"Starved?" she asked when George arrived. Myrtle started then to explain that they'd been so famished they'd just had to eat. Jerry's glance silenced her.

"No, I had some hot dogs down the road," George told them and Jerry laughed. Myrtle flushed. "Here, I brought some along for you kids," George went on, and brought out a paper plate covered with a paper napkin. Myrtle laughed then.

They ate the hot dogs with relish and put the spread-out lunch away. Then they busied themselves with the tent.

"Put it right out here," Myrtle ordered; "it's swanky enough for anyone."

It was a forest green umbrella tent with a canvas floor, and George made short work of getting it pegged. When that was done Jerry offered to put away the camp things while Myrtle and George drove to the village for some iodine to put on a cut Myrtle got on her hand.

Cots, a table and chairs, a small gasoline-burning stove, and a few dishes and cooking utensils had been stored with the tent. The girls had brought blankets from

their room and a suit case with the things they would need overnight. The next evening George would take them to town to get the rest of their outfits, which they had not wanted to bring until they were sure of a camp site.

Jerry had scarcely got the camp in order when she heard George's car rattling in at the tumbledown gate. For a fleeting moment she envied Myrtle—it must be fun to have a boy friend with a car, even a junky, old rattletrap. No, why not a real car? Men were all alike, only some were worse than others, not better. They should be chosen for what they had—there was a difference in the way they fooled girls about love.

She couldn't see any reason for Myrtle's beaming after George had kissed her goodbye. What was a kiss? No boy had ever kissed her though several had tried.

"Stop looking down the road like a mooney and show me how this stove works," she said irritably. Myrtle was such a confirmed nut about love. It made her sick. "Wait a few years," she thought, "and if I ask her what she thinks of marriage she'll tell me it's all right but a girl oughtn't to rush into it."

"Let the stove alone," Myrtle said good-naturedly; "and let's go for a swim. Too bad George couldn't stay, but he says the traffic's terrible and he wants to get home early."

"How romantic," Jerry murmured.

"Oh shut up and get into your bathing suit. Of course there won't be anyone to admire you but the ocean swells but maybe you'll get a kick out of that."

Jerry certainly did. Out of the whole thing, the bathing and the prospect of a night cool enough for comfort. She was almost happy when they sat down, hungry and

tired, to finish what was left of their midday lunch. The stove hadn't worked very well and Myrtle said they would have George fix it.

Jerry looked up at the sound of a motor in the air. A silver plane was winging overhead in what looked to her like the attempt of a huge butterfly to find a flower to land on. "Too bad George doesn't fly," she said lazily; "you need him so much."

"You'd get to depend on your boy friend, too, if you had one," Myrtle retorted instantly.

"Well, I'd like to know what that guy up there is depending upon," Jerry answered, her voice more serious than her words. "Look at him; he's pointing right at us! Run!"

She jumped to her feet and sprang backward, still yelling at Myrtle to get out of the way. She heard a shrill screech in answer, or rather one note of it, for the rest was drowned out by the uproar the plane made on its dive into their camp.

Jerry lost her balance and fell. She got a nasty crack on the side of her head and what followed immediately after the crash was lost to her. The first thing she became conscious of was the sensation of being cradled in a very satisfactory resting place. Her head was held just right in a place it fitted perfectly.

But that sense of security and ease was soon lost. A pain shot like fire across her brain and she cried out. Her eyes flashed open as the agony cleared her mind and she saw with a sensation she was never to forget, an unfamiliar masculine face bent over her own.

## CHAPTER II

DAN HARVEY'S wasn't a commonplace face at all. Jerry realized vaguely that she had never seen it before. Yet it did not surprise her that it was there. It wore such a friendly expression she felt quite at ease with it. Only it shouldn't have looked so unhappy.

Why was there so much pain? Oh yes, something had happened!

"How are you now?" an anxious voice inquired. "Lord, I hope you haven't any broken bones," it added fervently.

Jerry moved to sit up. The young man helped her. Suddenly she thought of Myrtle. "Is anybody hurt?" she cried.

"Everyone's all right but you," he answered. "I'm afraid your outfit is wrecked, though. And I think we'd better take you to a doctor. Do you think you can stand?"

Jerry wasn't sure that she could, but he assisted her to her feet so she could try. She wavered a little and then steadied herself with his help.

"How did you escape?" she asked when her glance fell upon the crumpled plane.

"A bit of luck. It isn't as bad as it looks. Now you wait until I get something for you to sit on and then I'll go for a car." He left her, to hunt round for a stool or chair.

Jerry saw Myrtle searching in the wreckage also, and a second young man poking around in the cockpit of the airplane. She called Myrtle. The latter came running over. She had been searching for the iodine. It was the only remedy at hand and she thought Jerry ought to have something.

"I thought maybe you were dead," Myrtle said cheerfully. "You were such a long time comin' to. Say, what do you think of this. . . ."

She was interrupted by Dan Harvey, who brought a broken-legged chair and propped it up for Jerry to sit on. The other young man came up as Jerry was thanking his companion.

"Go and get a car, Dan," he ordered abruptly.

"Right," Dan returned. "This young lady must be taken to a doctor immediately."

Jerry looked up in alarm. "I'm all right," she declared hurriedly, but she was as white as paper. The young man of the commanding voice frowned.

"Go for Dr. Belden," he said curtly, "and send Marsh over here with some brandy. Some damned sneak filched my flask from the ship."

"Please," Jerry begged. "I don't need a doctor." She was concerned with his fee. A doctor way out here—gosh, he'd charge a fortune! But the young man called Dan was off without further words.

"Where's your drinking water?" the other asked of Myrtle.

"We haven't boiled any yet," she told him. "The stove wouldn't work. But we've got some ginger ale."

"Better get it for your friend, then," he advised, looking at Jerry. She was leaning over, her elbow on her knee and her head in the palm of her hand, obviously in

great pain. If she was badly hurt he'd have the devil to pay with his old man, he was telling himself.

Jerry took a sip of the ginger ale when Myrtle held the glass to her lips and then pushed it away. The sweet taste sickened her.

"I'll get a blanket and you can lie down," Myrtle said and went to dig in the wreckage again.

"How do you feel?" the young man queried anxiously of Jerry.

"It's my head. I got a bump," Jerry told him. "I'll be all right in a minute. I don't want a doctor."

"Yes you do," very authoritatively. "I'm responsible for this and I'll see that you get the proper care."

"Were you flying the plane?" Jerry inquired curiously. Somehow she'd have said, so she told herself, that the other man was the flyer. The young man before her appeared to be slightly embarrassed.

"Well . . . er . . . yes, that is, it's my ship but my pilot was at the control," he answered, not deeming it necessary to explain that he also had a hand on the joy stick and that he had "frozen" on it at a crucial moment, making it impossible for Dan's skill to save them from a smashup.

Myrtle came over with a salvaged blanket which she spread out at Jerry's feet. Together she and their uninvited caller assisted the injured girl to lie down upon it.

"Get a wet towel and wrap it around her head," he ordered brusquely. Jerry expected Myrtle to resent his tone but apparently she was unaware of it for she trotted off obediently to do as he told her.

"He must be used to bossing people," Jerry thought and opened her eyes to take a close look at him. She saw a young man in his early twenties, good looking in

a coldly conventional blond way. There was nothing of distinction in his features. But a tiny golden brown mustache and an assured manner caused Jerry to overlook that fact. Others, too, had failed to weigh Alester Carstairs' savior faire against the inanity of his countenance.

Jerry was much impressed with his ready command of the situation and when a man whom even she recognized as a butler arrived hurriedly in a station wagon she began to perceive that someone of importance had crashed their camp.

"The brandy, sir, and a first aid kit," the butler said, bringing over a basket and placing it on the ground beside Jerry.

"All right, Marsh, open it. Here, give me the brandy." He poured a little in a glass the servant handed up to him and offered it to Jerry. She shook her head.

"I don't drink," she said; "please don't bother."

"You must," he said commandingly; "it will put you right until Dr. Belden gets here."

"I'd rather not," Jerry protested and turned to Myrtle. "Please wet the towel again," she begged; "it felt good."

"Perhaps the young lady would like some smelling salts, sir," the butler interposed as his master showed signs of pressing the unwanted drink upon the girl. "I've some here."

"Let's have them then," his master snapped.

Jerry found the aromatic crystals delightfully pleasant. She must, she thought, get some to send to her mother. They would help her, maybe, when she had one of those dizzy spells.

Myrtle had retrieved a pillow from a clump of wild blackberry bushes and Jerry was resting quite comfortably when Dan returned with Dr. Belden. Her head

ached with dull persistency but she had spent an agreeable half-hour talking with Alester.

She knew his name now—he had finally got around to introducing himself—and she thought whimsically that the mountain had come at least half way to Mahomet. For who didn't know that Alester Carstairs was one of the most eligible young men in the best four hundred in New York society?

She couldn't have done better if she'd had a year at Atlantic City. He was nice looking, too, and everything that he said and did showed that he probably didn't know there were such things in the world as jaundiced wall paper, oilcloth tablecovers, 10-cent bath towels and unfulfilled desires.

He seemed to have noticed, too, that she was rather nice even with her head in a towel and her face unpowdered, just as she had come from her swim in the Sound. Jerry knew perfectly well that she had a lovely complexion and a perfect body. She hoped Alester liked gold green eyes and burnished hair.

"Nothing serious," the doctor pronounced after a few minutes; "but I'd like you to come to my office tomorrow for a more thorough examination."

Jerry looked at him helplessly. How could she get to his office? Apparently one of the group at least must have read her thoughts. Dan looked at his employer.

"You won't need me, Alester," he said, "until the plane is repaired. I'll be glad to drive Miss . . . Ray isn't it? . . . to the doctor's office if she will let me."

Alester nodded, then suddenly a change came over his face and he said shortly: "I can do that much for Miss Ray myself. What hour, doctor?"

Jerry turned her eyes to Dan. She saw a grimness settle about his lips. It puzzled her. Surely he could not

mind having his offer rejected when obviously he had made it in courtesy only.

But it was remarkable, the way he had understood her unspoken need. There had never been anyone like that in her life before, except her mother. Perhaps she ought to tell Alester that she'd prefer to go with Dan . . . the thought startled her.

Prefer to go with Dan! Why, Dan was only a private aviator. . . .

His blue-gray eyes were watching her intently. She liked his eyes. Jerry brought her mind sharply back to the decision that faced her. She must say something—make her choice.

"Three o'clock," the doctor said and both Alester and Dan turned to Jerry for her answer.

## CHAPTER III

"THANK you," Jerry said very quietly, looking at Alester.

Dan Harvey turned abruptly away. He started toward the car in which he had brought Dr. Belden to the scene. Half way to it he halted and came back for a word with Myrtle.

"I was piloting the ship," he said, "and I'll be glad to pay for the damage to your tent and things. I'll come back after I've taken Dr. Belden to his office and help you get fixed up for the night."

Myrtle looked about her. "Gee, where'll we sleep? This tent's torn to pieces."

"We'll rig up a shelter for you on the porch," Dan offered. "And tomorrow, if you care to go to town with me, I'll replace the things that were destroyed."

"That won't be necessary," Alester broke in. "Let us know what the damage is and we'll pay it but I think you and Miss Ray will be more comfortable in the house."

Jerry saw Dan throw him a glance that she was almost certain was touched with contempt. But he made no reply beyond a brief, "all right," and strode away.

A few minutes later it was apparent that nearly everything belonging to the camp was in ruins.

"Go back to Carmoor and get a couple of cots, a bridge table or two, three or four folding chairs, some lawn seats and anything else you think these young ladies can

use," Alester instructed the worried-looking butler.

Jerry listened wide-eyed. Gee, wasn't he generous? Myrtle was busy getting their personal belongings together. She felt cold in her damp bathing suit. And hungry too. She hadn't got farther than a cheese sandwich when their callers dropped from the sky.

"Bring along something for their breakfast too," she heard Alester telling Marsh. Well, if he was that considerate he'd probably be glad to know that they hadn't anything left for supper either.

She walked over with firm purpose. "And you might pick up a cold chicken while you're over there, Mr. Marsh," Myrtle said firmly, but quaking a little in awe of the man. He reminded her unpleasantly of Mr. Gear, the aisle man in the lace department at Fane's.

Jerry gasped. "*Mr. Marsh!*" Holy hat, Mr. Carstairs would think they were a couple of boobs who'd never seen a Broadway show in their lives. But all the butlers on Broadway were named Meadows.

"Never mind, Meadows . . . or is it Marsh? We've had our supper," she said nonchalantly.

Myrtle barely suppressed a squawk as Jerry bent a forbidding glance upon her. Alester caught the little byplay. It amused him.

"I'm frightfully hungry myself," he remarked earnestly. "You might just collect a little snack for supper while you're about it, Marsh," he added, to Myrtle's satisfaction.

"I'd like to get out of this wet bathing suit," Myrtle complained a little later. "Who'd have thought it would be so cool when the sun went down?"

"I'll break open a door or window," Alester volunteered; "and you can dress in the house."

In a few minutes the girls were making use of an

improvised dressing room in the corner of the musty living room. Before they came out, wearing the little high-belted flapper dresses they'd put on that morning, Dan had returned.

He was engaged in low-voiced conversation with Alester when Jerry stepped out on the open porch. She caught a word of the latter's impatient, quick word.

Dan stopped talking as Jerry approached them. She welcomed him with a smile to make up for her earlier partiality. "We've already broken into the house," she said.

"So I see." It was said almost surlily. Jerry wondered if her first impression of him hadn't been too favorable.

"Dan's been reminding me that there's company at our house tonight," Alester grinned. "He thinks I ought to go home like a good little boy. But he intends to stay. He's brought a nice great big iced watermelon to ingratiate himself."

Jerry saw the melon, and a pile of paper bags on the ground. It hadn't been necessary to tell Dan that they hadn't finished eating, she said to herself and instantly regretted the admission. Dan Harvey might be about the best looking fellow she'd seen off the silver screen, but she wasn't going to fall for him. Hadn't she always said she wouldn't be a fool like most girls?

"That's nice," she said indifferently and turned away. She wondered what Dan would think of her. A moment ago she had smiled at him—letting herself be natural—and now she was giving him a cold shoulder. If he was hurt . . . well, he'd probably hurt a lot of girls in his time. Good looking fellows were careless with their affections.

"If you're staying I won't be needed," Dan said to

Alester. "I'll send one of the garage men over to look after the plane."

Alester regarded him with open irritation. "The plane's all right. I'll have Marsh cover the motor with some of this tent. Telephone the hangar, though, and tell them to come over in the morning."

Dan let his eyes seek out Jerry. "They'll make a lot of noise," he said to Alester. "It might disturb the girls. . . ."

"Hello." It was Myrtle. "How about keeping that promise to move us into the house?"

"Marsh can do that," Alester put in curtly.

"But we're all goin' to have supper, aren't we? Gee, look at that melon! My favorite fruit!"

"Thanks, but I've got to see about getting the men here to repair the plane," Dan said gruffly.

Marsh came, with a chauffeur and a light truck of furniture. The latter unloaded the truck while Marsh laid out the "little snack."

First there were small round bits of toast that he covered with tiny black eggs that he took from a jar. Jerry wondered what it was. Alester ate his with relish, dropping a little lemon juice on the black stuff.

"Don't you like caviar?" he inquired as Jerry hesitated to eat any.

Caviar! So this unappetizing stuff was it. She'd read of it. "Of course," she said taking up a canape, "but I'm not hungry. Anyway I really like the red better." That was a good touch, she felt, remembering that there was a red variety.

Alester lifted an eyebrow. "Perhaps you would like some pressed quail?" he asked as Marsh came to the table with a new dish.

Jerry shook her head. She was afraid of making a

break, as she said to herself. Her mind wasn't on what she was doing. Perhaps she should have urged Dan to stay.

She realized that she had drifted away on her thoughts when a sentence of Myrtle's penetrated her dreamy withdrawal. "A hundred and fifty dollars ought to cover everything," was what her friend had said.

"A hundred and fifty dollars!"

"I'm sure that can't be enough," Alester returned. "I've never bought a tent. . . ."

"Oh well, it wasn't a brand new tent," Myrtle confided.

The little gyp! Jerry knew what that tent had cost. Now he would think they were a couple of gold diggers as well as ignoramuses.

"I'll bring you a check tomorrow when I come to take Miss Ray to the doctor's," Alester promised Myrtle. "And don't be surprised if we aren't back for dinner. I don't carry a clock when I'm having a good time."

## CHAPTER IV

IT WAS the novelty of the noises she heard and not their volume that awakened Jerry that first morning in "camp." The racket sounded for all the world like a chorus of cats having a concert in the trees.

"Catbirds," Myrtle said when she opened her eyes and saw Jerry sitting up in her cot, listening to the symphony of strange sounds. "You'll get used to them."

"My first chance to sleep late on a Monday morning, and the birds have to spoil it," Jerry wailed. "An elevator train would not have bothered me half so much."

"Well, you should worry," Myrtle grinned. "It's a wonder you could sleep at all with Alester Carstairs on your mind."

Jerry turned to her with an eager light breaking over her countenance.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she cried enthusiastically. "I never thought I'd meet anyone like him."

"Yeah, God's gift to shopgirls," Myrtle answered with a short laugh. Then, suddenly serious, "Better watch your step kiddo. The boy seems to like your company."

Jerry threw the camp blankets back with impatience.

"Let's get something to eat," she said, reaching for her shoes and stickings.

"You'll have a tough time if you're always so overcome with his nibs' glory that you can't eat in his presence," Myrtle teased her. "That was some swell supper

you passed up last night. I wish I knew what that salad was."

"I think it was alligator pear," Jerry replied, desiring to keep Myrtle off the subject of Alester Carstairs. She wasn't going to like being teased about him in connection with her avowed ambition to marry money, she told herself. Myrtle had a way of making it look cheap, while really, if you considered it sensibly. . . .

"Well, anyway, I'm glad you made a hit with him," Myrtle broke in on her thoughts. "I'll have a swell camping outfit next year with the money he's giving me for the damage his plane did, and we've got a stove that works so we can have a hot breakfast."

She paused and looked around the room. "Fixed this place up great, didn't he? Just like rubbing a magic lantern. 'Marsh do this and Marsh do that!' Presto. But you know," she added confidentially, "I think the other chap would wear better."

Jerry stood still and looked at her unsmilingly.

"That's the trouble with most girls like us," she said quietly. "We're suffering from inferiority. As a class, I mean. But to me a man's a man. I can't see any reason for being less afraid of a poor man than a rich one."

"Oh, go hire a soap box," Myrtle retorted good naturedly. "But don't think you can kid the rest of the world like you kid yourself. If you think there's any chance of your marrying Alester Carstairs you're cuckoo."

Jerry flushed darkly.

"I wouldn't want to marry Alester Carstairs without knowing him better," she said sharply. "But you don't need to be warning me about him. I've known some boys with half of next week's pay spent in advance who

weren't anything to go around with blindfolded. The reason some people stop right where they were born is because they think everyone who has money is the villain in the piece. And it's a sure thing you'll never interest a man by showing him you think he's better than you are."

"That isn't it at all, Jerry," Myrtle came back earnestly. "This guy doesn't speak your language. You might as well be living on different worlds. I was born here. I know. If you were a chorus girl, now, then. . . ."

"What's the use of our arguing it?" Jerry interrupted. "Whatever happens will be between Alester and me."

"All right, but there isn't going to be anything between me and breakfast but just time to wash my face," Myrtle agreed hungrily.

Jerry said nothing more and in a few minutes they were trying out the new oil stove and finding it satisfactory. After a hearty breakfast they set about cleaning up the living room and arranging the porch furniture.

Myrtle noticed that Jerry frequently cast her eyes in the direction of the highway and assumed that she was thinking of Alester. As a matter of fact she was thinking of Dan Harvey. The men who were to repair the plane hadn't come and Jerry was wondering if he would be with them when they did arrive.

She was impatient with herself because he had entered her thoughts. He had no place there. What would he mean to her? He wasn't half so pleasant as his employer. She couldn't, however, forget the sensation she had known when she came to consciousness in his arms. It had been, for a brief moment, startlingly agreeable.

An hour passed. She told Myrtle that her head was aching and her friend suggested a swim. The sun was

high now and the buzz of countless insects was vocal proof that the day was running a temperature.

Jerry seemed reluctant to leave the house, but she gave in after a little coaxing because she did not want Myrtle to guess what was on her mind. And while they were in the water the men came to repair the plane. The girls saw their car enter the grounds but they could not recognize any of the occupants.

"Let's go up and get acquainted," Myrtle said, swimming for shore. Jerry followed, but when she waded out of the water she dropped down on the sand and sat there. She had changed her mind. She wouldn't go up to the house. If Dan Harvey was there she didn't want to see him. And yet something caused her to watch closely while the men worked. She did not see Dan among them.

"Well, I'm going up and get dressed," Myrtle announced firmly after a while. "You'd better come along and make yourself look like you need that trip to the doctor's. Your friend might think you're going just for the ride."

By three o'clock Jerry was really pale and tired. The men had gone, though the plane remained. It was not yet ready to be flown. Jerry did not ask so she did not know that. Maybe they were leaving it for Dan to fly. The thought robbed the prospect of driving with Alester of a little of its pleasure. What if Dan came and flew away while she was absent? Well, of course, that wouldn't mean anything except that she'd rather like to see him take off.

Her attitude, when Alester came, surprised him. He'd been telling himself that she was flattered by his attentions, a shade too ready to accept them to suit his taste. But then, that kind of girl would be easy to handle. If

she wasn't amusing after the first meeting or two he'd drop her.

He came in a black roadster with yellow leather upholstery and much gleaming nickel. Jerry thrilled when she climbed into it and Myrtle stood by, unable to still a slight pang of envy. It had never crossed her mind to wish she had fallen in love with anyone other than George, but she realized now that Jerry certainly was getting the break she had wanted.

"How's the head?" Alester asked when they were under way.

"Much better, thank you." She said it rather listlessly.

He turned to look at her.

"Sleep well?"

She nodded without looking at him. He jerked his head around to sight the road ahead, then turned back to her. Jerry let him look, with her eyes straight ahead. She wondered at herself. In her plans this opportunity with the "right man" had found her sparkling, vivacious, alluring. But now she didn't feel like sparkling. Perhaps something serious had happened to her head.

Alester was satisfying himself that she was as pretty as he had thought last night. Suddenly a possible explanation of her new manner flashed across his mind. Harvey was capable, he told himself, of interfering.

"Was Dan Harvey around this morning?" he asked abruptly. Jerry started.

"No," she said. "Why?"

"I thought he might have wanted to look over the plane by daylight," Alester replied. "Good pilot, Dan, but a little gruff at times."

Jerry could have told him that Dan could be tender

also, but she wasn't out with Alester Carstairs to talk about his aviator, she reminded herself sharply.

"Don't be long," he begged her when they reached the doctor's office. "And tell him to send the bill to me . . . no, here, it might find its way to dad's and there'd be a rumpus. This isn't the first accident. Please take this money and pay Dr. Belden." He held out a folded bill and after a moment's hesitation Jerry took it.

A casual glance at the figures on it brought a protest to her lips.

A hundred dollars!

Why, no doctor would charge so much. But the protest was never uttered. Jerry had a second thought.

## CHAPTER V

SHE must not argue with Alester Carstairs about money, Jerry told herself.

She must be nonchalant—certainly he wouldn't admire humbleness, and it was but fair that he should bear the expense to which he had put her. She could return what was left of the hundred dollars after the doctor was paid.

She flashed a sunny smile at him.

"Lucky for you I didn't break an arm," she said.

He regarded her gravely.

"I'm glad you didn't, of course," he replied, "but I'd be happy to assume any liability I might incur with you."

Jerry was lightly confused by his remark, and her confusion annoyed her. He hadn't done anything to cause her to add a double meaning to the things he said. She turned quickly toward the house—Dr. Belden's office was in his residence.

Alester smiled as he watched her go.

"Not so dumb," he told himself complacently.

When Jerry returned she handed him some folded up bills.

"Thirty-two dollars," she said, meaning the change.

"What is Dr. Belden, a billionaire?"

"He's a renowned surgeon," Alester told her. "What did he say about you?"

He took the money because something in Jerry's man-

ner made him realize that he could not pay for her injury with dollars, except as she must pay for it. The other girl had accepted his check for \$150 a little too eagerly. He was glad Jerry was different. Such girls as she, those who scorned small change, usually wanted something worth while, he believed. He liked costly things himself—even expensive playmates.

"I'm not to have any excitement for a while," Jerry said and laughed softly.

Excitement! Why, not 48 hours back the bottom fell out of her world and it had been a tragedy. And now she knew that it had dropped her right into an entirely new universe, a universe that hitherto had been only a dream to her.

"In that case I'll have to see that you're kept quiet," Alester assured her promptly. "Can't go back to camp. Dan's taking the plane over to the hangar, I think. No room to take it off where it is."

Jerry wished he hadn't mentioned Dan. For the moment he was out of her mind. She'd been getting a tremendous kick out of spinning along on a work day in a car that would have drawn a crowd even if it had been parked on Fifth Avenue.

Thought of Dan dispelled some of her thrill. She didn't want him to think that she had refused his offer to bring her to Dr. Belden's simply because Alester could account for more gold . . . but that was precisely why she had refused him!

Jerry felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"We'll drive out to Port Jefferson and drop in for tea at the Rolling Stone Inn on our way back," Alester was saying. The prospect of a drive appealed to Jerry—perhaps a sense of motion and constantly changing scenes would help her to think as she wanted to think.

This was more than she'd ever expected out of life—and her enjoyment of it was clouded because a man with dark blue-gray eyes had magnetism in his touch. It seemed cruel to Jerry that the realization of more than her wildest dreams would be so marred. She told herself that she was beginning to dislike Dan Harvey.

There had been days when she worked in the humid, breathless atmosphere of Fane's on which she'd have been tempted to gamble with her soul at stake for a drive like this.

The sweeping, wooded hills, the sudden descent upon little harbor villages, the landscaped grounds of beautiful estates, the luxury and speed of the high-powered motor car—all were exquisitely new to Jerry. They seemed to release a wellspring of emotion, to cause her to feel as if she were fairly soaring over the earth.

And yet her elation was dimmed by a troubled conscience—she felt she had been ungrateful to one who had been tender toward her.

At Port Jefferson they turned back, inland, and drove far beyond the speed limit on their way to the inn. Jerry thought of many coal black steeds charging furiously ahead of them. This man-made thing under the hood held power equal to nearly a hundred horses' strength, Alester had told her.

Influenced by Alester's importance and the knowledge that she was near some of the finest estates in the world, Jerry was prepared to find the Rolling Stone Inn a palatial place.

She was both surprised and put at ease when Alester turned the nose of his car in at the approach to what looked like a private home such as they had passed by the dozen. A shingle on the house bore the name, else

Jerry would not have been certain that they were at their destination.

Alester parked the car on a pebbled space and helped Jerry out. She saw, on closer inspection, that the place was more impressive than she had thought at first. There was a fountain in a more or less formal garden and as they approached the entrance the door swung open for them and a burly colored man in uniform greeted Alester familiarly.

Jerry surmised that he must be a frequent visitor here. And for an instant she felt that the doorman regarded her in what might have been surprise or confusion or alarm. She could not decide which.

They were shown to a pleasantly placed table on a screened porch. Jerry noted that it had a more luxuriant centerpiece than the other tables. It seemed, in a way she could not define, to be a special table. The waiter hadn't exactly shown them to it, but when he led the way to that end of the porch Alester had indicated that they would sit there.

Again it seemed to Jerry that she inspired something like consternation when the waiter glanced at her. She became self conscious. Her dress, of course! She knew that she wasn't dressed as the girls of Alester's acquaintance dressed.

Oh why had she been too indifferent about camping to care what she wore! All those pretty, dainty things in her suitcase! She must get them tonight when she went to town with Myrtle and George. She wondered what time it was and how long it required to have tea in the Rolling Stone Inn. She hoped they would wait for her if she were late.

There seemed to be no hurry about bringing their re-

freshments. Indeed, Alester did not bother to give an order. Jerry expected him to ask what she liked, but he didn't do that either.

They talked. He'd been asking her questions all afternoon. Jerry thought he must be deeply interested in her to want to know so much about her.

Where did she come from?

What did she do?

Where did her family live?

Presently, when she was wishing that he would talk of something else, a waiter appeared with a tray and Jerry found a tall glass filled with amber fluid and tinkling ice set before her. It looked like tea. There was also a plate of tiny paper-thin sandwiches. Jerry regarded them greedily. She had eaten little at lunch. But Alester ignored them, not even suggesting that she have one.

She looked around for sugar for her tea. There was none.

Alester lifted his glass. She couldn't take tea without sugar.

"Will you please have the waiter bring some powdered sugar?" she asked, wishing she didn't sound so timid. The next time . . . when she was better dressed . . . and when people didn't look at her so strangely. . . .

"Sugar!" Alester repeated. "I don't think you'll need it with this. No one ever has improved upon Slim's mixing."

Jerry wondered what he meant. Perhaps iced tea came to the table already sugared at the Rolling Stone Inn. She told herself that she must be more careful about making stupid breaks. She said nothing more about sugar but lifted her glass and took a drink from it. Instantly she set it down, a startled expression on her face.

This was not tea!

Alester was watching her.

"What's the matter," he asked. "Don't you like it?"

Jerry stuttered. Her throat tingled and her eyes smarted. She had almost choked over the strong beverage and only an heroic swallow had saved her from greater distress.

"It's too strong," she managed to say when she could take away the napkin she had hurriedly pressed to her lips.

"I'm sorry," Alester said. "I should have asked what you'd like."

Jerry smiled at him.

"If you don't mind," she said hesitatingly; "I'd like tea." Then more boldly, "with sugar."

This wasn't at all the way she had planned to act when she got "her chance." Where was her insouciance, the woman-of-the-world air she meant to assume?

She glanced anxiously at Alester.

But apparently he was not noticing her simpleness. His attention was held by someone who was approaching them unseen by Jerry.

And his face wore a very odd expression.

## CHAPTER VI

JERRY turned to see who or what had brought that queer expression to Alester's face.

She saw nothing more startling than an unusually attractive woman, in her late twenties perhaps, coming toward them.

The newcomer was dressed in black and white chiffon and around her full, creamy throat she wore a choker of cabachon rubies. This much Jerry saw before Alester rose from his chair to greet her.

Jerry sought to keep her mind on the rules for introductions that she had read in a book on etiquette when she was preparing for her invasion of Atlantic City. She remembered that a woman need not rise, unless . . . what was it? Something about age. She'd better sit still, she decided.

"Leontine—this is Miss Ray—Miss Ray, Miss Lebaudy," Alester was introducing them.

"How do you do?" Jerry said, remembering just in time not to say, "Pleased to meet you."

Leontine Lebaudy said nothing for what threatened to become an awkward length of time. Then: "New to us, aren't you?" she drawled.

Jerry looked helplessly at Alester.

"That can be corrected," he said, smiling.

Leontine frowned briefly.

"Of course," she said hurriedly, letting her eyes rove over the table. "How's your drink?"

"Not so good," Alester replied. "Miss Ray doesn't like it."

Leontine looked at Jerry questioningly. The latter did not like the look. She could not define the quality in it that displeased her, but the word "patronizing" flashed through her mind and she couldn't have hit much closer. Leontine Lebaudy had estimated Jerry quickly as an outsider.

Jerry decided to be natural. She did not drink and they might as well know it. She wasn't going to apologize for it either.

"I never drink intoxicating liquors," she said stiffly, and Leontine turned to Alester with uplifted eyebrows.

"Are you undertaking her education?" she said.

"I think I'd rather learn from Miss Ray how to be good," he answered slowly.

Leontine gave him a furious glance. Jerry was aware by this time that they were crossing swords.

"Who gave you this table?" Leontine said crossly. "It's reserved for dinner. I didn't want it used."

Alester half closed his eyelids but not sufficiently to hide a gleam of amusement in his eyes as he answered.

"This table is for me whenever I want it," he said. "You know that, Leontine."

To Jerry's amazement the woman he addressed turned a suddenly appealing look upon him.

"But you never want it any more, Alester," she said, and Jerry had the sensation of feeling her presence forgotten.

"Not since I learned who else reserves it," Alester returned coolly. "I prefer something more exclusive."

The woman shrank back as though from a blow, but the next instant she laughed.

"Some people can't be dropped, you know," she said almost under her breath. "It isn't safe."

Jerry thought she detected a pleading note in her voice, but if it were there, Alester seemed unaware of it.

"So far as I know," he said, "you never tried it. But you can fix up another table. Miss Ray and I will keep this one and stay to dinner."

Again that cringe, so fleeting that Jerry was to wonder later if she really had seen it, and Leontine made a motion of resignation.

"Let's have some radio music," Alester added. "I'd like to dance."

Leontine Lebaudy left them. Jerry felt a twinge of pain in her head and remembered that the doctor had ordered quietude. This was certainly not being quiet, she thought, when Alester insisted that they dance. He must have forgotten about her recent injury.

It tired her to dance, but she felt she ought to do it inasmuch as she would not drink. You couldn't be thinking only of yourself when you were another person's guest. . . .

She wished that Alester had not been so disagreeable to Miss Lebaudy. Perhaps they ought to give up the table. She started to suggest as much but at her first words Alester silenced her.

"It is my table," he said firmly, and Jerry could not dispute him.

But Miss Lebaudy seemed to blame her. Now and then when she came to their table as hostess—Alester had said she owned the place—Jerry could fairly feel her animosity. But her dark eyes wore a non-committal

expression and her words were pleasant enough. Jerry's sense of an undercurrent of ill feeling was based on something too intangible to put into words.

And her impression that Alester was deliberately wounding Miss Lebaudy at every opportunity persisted. It occurred to Jerry that he might have brought her there as an offense to Leontine. She began to feel miserable.

"I think I'd like you to take me home," she said at the end of a dance. "It isn't fair of me to leave my friend alone."

"She doesn't expect you," Alester objected. "I told her not to. And you know you said she's going to New York with someone tonight."

"I'd like to go with them," Jerry explained. "I have to get some things."

"I'll drive you in," Alester offered.

Jerry could not find any further excuse to leave so she sighed and drank some more tea.

She noticed that Alester watched the door pretty closely as the dinner hour drew near and more people arrived. She found herself doing the same under the power of his expectation, though she did not understand it.

"Oh, there's Mr. Harvey," she cried in pleased surprise as Dan came and stood in the doorway, looking around the room. Alester glanced at her sharply, noting the eagerness that she herself was unconscious of.

She thought he might go over, or signal Dan, and invite him to join them, but he purposely avoided looking his way after the first glance. Dan saw them, however, and came up without any encouragement.

By the time he reached their table Jerry had curbed her natural emotion. Both greeted him unenthusias-

tically. Dan did not appear to notice their lack of cordiality.

"Got the plane back to the hangar," he said, to make conversation. Alester mumbled some comment.

Jerry was wondering what had brought Dan there. Could it have been of him that Alester and Miss Lebaudy were talking when they had their verbal skirmish over the table reservation? She looked at Dan with new interest. Alester had implied that whoever was his competitor for the reservation was not exclusive. And Miss Lebaudy had hinted that he was dangerous.

Certainly Dan Harvey did not look dangerous unless you considered him as a rival in affairs of the heart. Jerry felt her own skip a beat as he took a swift appraisal of her features. Why did he look at her like that? What did he expect?

She saw Leontine coming toward them and half anticipated a denouement. But nothing out of the ordinary happened. Leontine greeted Dan casually and he was briefly courteous to her.

"Have a dance with me, Alester?" Leontine begged. She wanted to talk to him alone but hadn't had an opportunity until there was someone to take his place with Jerry. "Miss Ray has monopolized you all afternoon. She can dance once with Dan."

The musicians had arrived and the music was now tantalizing to dancing feet. Jerry looked at Dan expectantly. He spoke directly to her, disregarding the other two.

"You don't look fit to dance," he said quietly. "You're pale as a sheet. Alester ought to take you home."

"Dan's right," Alester admitted contritely. "I forgot the doctor told you to keep quiet."

"Sit out this dance, then," Leontine said to Jerry. "Dinner will be served immediately."

Jerry nodded. Alester and Leontine swept away. She let her eyes follow them to avoid looking at Dan. Why had it to be he who was thoughtful, she was asking herself discontentedly. But she must remember, a man of Alester Carstairs' position probably had a thousand things to think of while Dan Harvey had one—his job, most likely.

Dan did not press conversation upon her. He asked if he might smoke and Jerry looked at him in astonishment. She did not know that anyone any longer asked permission to do that.

"Go ahead," she said shortly and Dan puffed away in silence.

Leontine and Alester, on the contrary, were deep in some subject. Jerry thought they made a handsome couple and they danced divinely together. She doubted if she could dance as well as Leontine, and she was considered a first rate dancer.

There was a flashing grace in the woman's movement that brought to Jerry's mind thoughts of the jungle. Her dark hair, straight as a blackbird's wing, shone like lacquered ebony. She held her face turned up to Alester's so that he could look deep into her eyes. She knew her beauty stirred him. The embrace of the dance, the subtle perfume creeping like a breath from some far garden, all had their potency.

Leontine knew how to choose her moments.

"Please," she coaxed; "please Allie."

## CHAPTER VII

"ALL right," Alester said grudgingly. "I'll come to your party since you're so irresistible, but only upon one condition."

Leontine caught her breath. She did not like the firmness in his voice.

"You will have to ask Miss Ray also," Alester added after a significant pause.

Leontine flashed daggers at him, but she said nothing until she could force herself to speak indifferently. Whatever else Leontine Lebaudy was capable of she could practice self control. But she wouldn't give in without a struggle.

"Really, Alester," she said with a nervous smile, "Miss Ray is hardly the sort of person to ask to one of our parties."

Alester did not smile back at her.

"Why?" he asked.

Leontine shrugged.

"Well . . . her appearance for one thing. She looks like a rummage sale and she's a complete washout as far as pep goes. She'd be a wet blanket."

"You're jealous," Alester told her brutally. "Miss Ray had a nasty blow on the head yesterday. You'd go to bed for a week if anything like that happened to you."

Leontine bit her lip.

"Just the same . . ." she began.

"Just the same you will have to ask her if you want me," Alester interrupted.

"Oh, all right," Leontine flared. "Bring her. But see that she has something decent to wear."

"Leave that to me," Alester replied.

Leontine was now thoroughly aroused over Jerry. She guessed that Alester had brought the girl to the Rolling Stone Inn just to torment her, but he was carrying his interest in Jerry a little too far, she thought, when he insisted upon having her at a party in which she could not possibly fit.

How had he met a girl like that, anyway? A 10-cent girl who didn't drink! She'd never known Alester to care for anything so simple before.

She put the question to him but Alester would not tell her how he had crashed the girls' camp. Very well, she told herself, she would get the information from Jerry! And spike any growing ambition the girl might have at the same time.

"I'm sorry I didn't know you had an accident," she said sweetly to Jerry when she and Alester returned to the table. "Stupid of me not to see that you have a bandage under your bandeau."

Jerry regarded her in surprise. Her sudden pleasantness was puzzling.

"Miss Ray ought to go home," Dan said crisply.

Leontine smiled at Jerry.

"But I wish you'd come up to my rooms first," she said. "You can rest a few minutes. It would refresh you for the drive back to . . . where is it you are living?"

"New York."

It was Alester who gave the information before Jerry had a chance to speak. She did not correct him to say

that she was camping on the North Shore. She knew that these two were thrusting at each other with double-edged words. Jerry had enough sense to keep quiet when she did not know the ground.

But Leontine's invitation to rest in her room appealed to her. She felt queerly weak and faint. She rose and while Dan stood, watching grimly, and Alester turned a bemused expression upon them, she walked off with Leontine.

They passed up broad, uncarpeted stairs to a long and wide upper hall. Open doors offered glimpses into private rooms luxuriantly furnished. In one suite waiters were preparing for a private party. Jerry saw a bowl of orchids on the table and thick yellow candles in silver candlesticks.

She realized then that Leontine's place was a rendezvous for smart people. No wonder the waiters had looked askance at her.

Leontine threw open a heavy mahogany door and stepped into a large room, holding the door open for Jerry to follow.

"Lie down on the chaise longue," she said hospitably and motioned toward what Jerry would have called the sofa. It was covered with a large spread and many small silk pillows. Jerry knew something about lace and the idea of reposing upon a spread such as this seemed almost sacrilege to her—until she reminded herself that wealthy people used their best things.

"Have you any smelling salts?" she asked Leontine, remembering those the Carstairs butler had brought to camp.

"I'll get you some eau de Cologne," the other replied and closed the door. Jerry sank upon the chaise longue

and breathed a sigh of relief. She had not known how weak she really was.

Leontine hurried into an adjoining room. In a moment she was back with a large crystal bottle. Some of its contents she poured on a soft linen towel and began to bathe Jerry's forehead. She had wondered about the girl's complexion. It was almost too perfect to be natural. And yet Jerry obviously was not a patron of a beauty parlor capable of imparting such magic smoothness and luscious color to her skin by artificial means. Such service would be priceless, Leontine knew, if it could be found.

Still it surprised her to discover that Jerry had no makeup at all on her face. The light powder she used came away with the cologne only to reveal a skin which made Leontine think that powdering it was indeed an instance of gilding the lily.

Jerry lay with her eyes closed, unaware of Leontine's critical yet reluctant admiration and growing hatred. The cool, quiet room and soothing fragrance of the cologne helped her to relax.

Leontine left her for a moment and when she returned Jerry opened her eyes. Leontine was smoking a long, brown cigaret.

"Have one?" she invited. Jerry shook her head and Leontine smiled crookedly. She was beginning to see, so she told herself, what there was about Jerry that intrigued Alester. Novelty, of course.

She doubted if, in all his acquaintances, there was a girl who neither smoked nor drank. Until he met Jerry. Other nice girls—how she despised that word—might exist in his set. Leontine supposed that they did, but Alester, she knew, had not been interested in them.

It would be easier now to know what to do. If she could only get Jerry to talk, to tell how far matters had gone between them—Jerry and Alester. She was gratifyingly certain that Alester had not entirely lost his interest in her; his jealousy proved it. He could enjoy the novelty of Jerry without bringing her to the Rolling Stone Inn, Leontine assured herself. His doing so convinced her that he wanted to hurt. But she knew that a casual interest in the beginning oftentimes leads to a deeper attraction.

Jerry's novelty must be destroyed!

"I must go now," Jerry said, sitting up.

"Are you feeling better?" Leontine inquired.

Jerry nodded.

"Much, thank you," she said.

"I hope you will be in shape for a party on the fifteenth," Leontine said cordially. "It's going to be quite an affair. Alester wants to bring you. He seems to be pretty much enamored," she added, watching Jerry closely from behind a smiling mask.

Jerry hesitated to answer. She felt at a loss with Leontine. Finally: "He hasn't asked me," she said simply. That would not commit her.

"He will," Leontine replied laconically. "Rather unusual, your meeting, wasn't it?" she added, hitting in the dark. It must be so, she believed, and if Jerry could be led to think that she knew about it she might talk.

Jerry was taken in by the trick. She knew that Alester had told Leontine of her accident. It did not occur to her to suppose that he had omitted the story of the crash.

"Yes, it was," she admitted, and then because she felt that she had not been sufficiently appreciative of Leontine's kindness she told her how Alester Carstairs and

Dan Harvey had dropped in from out of the sky on their newly erected camp and destroyed it.

It was only after she had come to the end of her narrative that she remembered Alester's answer to Leontine's question about her residence. She wondered if she had said too much. And Leontine could get no more information from her.

Leontine had been sitting by her.

"Well," she said, getting up, "I hope nothing will keep you from coming to my party. It's my birthday."

Suddenly she lifted an arm and drew Jerry's attention to an inch-wide diamond bracelet that she had put on since coming upstairs. "Alester gave me this last year," she said boastfully. And then, looking curiously at Jerry, "He's very generous, but I suppose you know that."

Jerry flushed.

"He's been very generous in settling for the damage his plane did," she said coldly.

She more than suspected now that Leontine was a first class gold digger. "If she thinks she can put me in that class she's mistaken," Jerry told herself.

Leontine smiled secretly over Jerry's obvious resentment. She had wanted to make it difficult for Alester to see that Jerry was properly gowned for the party. If Jerry came, looking like a frump . . .

Leontine believed she had scored a trick.

## CHAPTER VIII

ON the drive back to camp from the Rolling Stone Inn Alester asked Jerry to go with him to Leontine's party.

Jerry scarcely knew what to say. She wanted to go . . . she'd never been to a real party where the men wore evening clothes and the women had on low cut dresses. Moreover she thought it would be ungracious on her part to refuse unless she had a real reason for not wishing to go.

Alester had surprised her with his unexpected solicitude when she came down from Leontine's room. Jerry had begun to suspect him of being self-centered. But he showed such concern all through dinner, which was served quickly when Jerry expressed a desire to get back and see if Myrtle and George were waiting for her, that she reversed her opinion.

"I'm thoroughly ashamed of my thoughtlessness," he told her when they were in the car. Jerry wondered for a moment if Dan Harvey had said anything to him about her condition while she was upstairs with Leontine. Dan was not there when she and Leontine came down and no one spoke of him.

Had she looked around when she and Alester drove away in the black roadster she might have seen the car Dan had used to bring Dr. Belden to camp parked off at one side.

A few minutes after Alester's motor roared away

from the inn Dan left the place where he had stood leaning against a stone coping, puffing on a cold pipe. He got into his car and drove leisurely in the direction Alester and Jerry had taken.

"Well, will you come?" Alester pressed, referring to Leontine's party.

"Why . . . I . . . I don't know," Jerry stammered. Inwardly she was asking herself why she was being such a fool. Of course she would go. Wasn't it just what she's been planning for? Better, even?

Alester read an entirely erroneous interpretation into her reluctance to answer. Her costume! He believed that was troubling her.

"Of course I know you must have lost most of your wardrobe when your tent was torn to pieces," he said, to afford her a pretext for accepting an evening outfit from him.

He doubted if she'd ever owned an evening dress—Myrtle had gratuitously informed him of their connection with Fane's department store—but he could not crudely offer to buy her one, he understood.

"You must let me replace everything you lost," he went on. "It's bad enough to have made you suffer without putting you to any financial loss."

Jerry searched his face before replying, as well as she could without betraying her doubt of his sincerity. He must surely know that she hadn't lost much, she thought. And what he already had paid Myrtle was too much. She had not set out to be a petty grafter. She must put him right about that.

"My clothes are in New York," she said simply; "but I don't think Miss Lebaudy really wants me at her party."

"Nonsense!" Alester exclaimed impatiently. "But it's only semi-private anyhow and I want you there."

There was conviction in his voice and he dropped his right hand from the wheel to reach for one of hers. Jerry let him hold it.

Before they reached the camp he stopped the car in a dark spot at the side of the road and put an arm along the seat at Jerry's back. She stiffened nervously.

"What's the matter, afraid?" he teased. Jerry regretted having let him hold her hand. It always led to greater familiarity. She had discovered that long ago. She wasn't surprised at what he did, but she hadn't expected Alester Carstairs to cover his acts with the same sort of banter and chaff that boys of her class employed.

"No," she said coolly; "I'm not afraid, because you are going to stop right now or I'll get out and walk the rest of the way."

Alester drew his hand off her shoulder and sat back to regard her soberly.

"But you know," he said in an injured tone, "I'd love to kiss you . . . Jerry."

Her name slipped softly from his lips and Jerry thought for an instant that it might be nice to let him kiss her. It was only for an instant, however. The temptation disappeared almost as soon as it had come.

But the brief instant startled her. She wasn't in love with him. What had made her think that kissing would be nice? It had always been wholly repugnant to her before when one of the boys had tried to paw her or possess her lips.

"Take me home," she said, so sharply that Alester obeyed her in silence.

It was a new experience to him to have his caresses

refused. Why in thunder did he want to waste his time on a little prude like this girl!

Jerry was sorry for her temper before they reached camp. As far as she knew there was no reason why they shouldn't kiss each other if they wanted to. She needn't have acted as if he'd insulted her.

She smiled up at his glowing countenance so beseechingly that Alester, glimpsing her expression from the corner of his eye, was somewhat mollified.

"Sorry?" he asked.

"Not exactly," Jerry returned demurely. "I don't want you to be angry, but I don't pet and I don't like to be kissed."

Alester ground on the brakes and the car came to a standstill before the house she was camping in.

"You're either an awful little fraud or you're a girl in a million," he said, turning to face her.

"I don't think I'm either," she returned, flushing. "There are lots of girls who wouldn't pet if they didn't think they had to or not have any boy friends at all."

Alester smiled.

"Well, how about you? Have you found the exception among us?"

"I haven't any boy friends," Jerry said directly.

"Because you wouldn't pet?" Alester quizzed her.

"Because I . . . had other things to think about," Jerry evaded.

"A career, perhaps?"

Jerry hesitated over her answer.

"Yes," she said slowly, "a career—to be successful."

Alester, too, paused a while.

"Well," Alester said, "I do. I'm happy to see that you're so confoundedly attractive. People won't climb for the highest fruit unless it's tempting. Some of the

little ladies have to make a play for their happiness if they're to get it."

Jerry sighed.

"Happiness," she repeated. "Is there such a thing?"

"Stop it," Alester begged. "You're getting me groggy. I thought that no one but our burned-out modern youth ever got bored with life."

"I'm not bored," Jerry denied. "I dream of thrills, but I don't believe in happiness the way most people think of it."

"Well," Alester said, "I do. I'm happy to see that your friends have departed for the wicked city if the absence of all signs of life hereabout means anything. Shall we follow or could I entice you to sit on yonder porch and delve deeper into this fascinating subject?"

Jerry laughed.

"I must go to town," she said.

"Can't you 'phone a message to Miss Crane to bring what you want? Then we could go for a moonlight sail—there's just wind enough," Alester coaxed.

"Gee, that would be great," Jerry cried, forgetting how tired she'd been and that she was trying not to say, "Gee."

She knew it wasn't an elegant expression but force of habit was strong and she had grown up with the word.

"Get in," Alester said, motioning toward the roadster. "We'll go some place and telephone. Then I'll drive you back here to wait and I'll go over to the boathouse for the Sprite. I'll send a man ashore for you in the dingey."

Less than half an hour later they were back. Myrtle, engaged in packing her own things when Jerry telephoned, had promised to bring out what she wanted.

"Have you a warm sweater?" Alester asked before he left her. "You know I believe you're being uppish with me. It's only fair to let me replace what my plane destroyed."

"You can lend me a sweater tonight," Jerry appeased him.

"Wait for the dingey down by the water," he called from the roadster as he tore down the old driveway.

It was only after he was gone that Jerry realized he might have taken her with him if—if he had wanted to take her to his home! The boathouse was at Carmoor, of course.

Suddenly, waiting for him at the water's edge seemed questionable to her. Why, it was just like waiting for a man on a street corner. Some boys didn't know better than to ask a girl to do that, she told herself. But Alester Carstairs did.

Myrtle had warned her, she remembered. Well, if he had an idea that she was cheap. . . .

Jerry's unpleasant reflections were interrupted by a sound on the highway. It was not a familiar sound, in a sense, but when Jerry looked in the direction whence it came she couldn't have told whether she was pleased at what was revealed to her, or whether she was vexed about it.

## CHAPTER IX

DAN HARVEY was driving in at the gateway!

Jerry stood on the porch steps and waited until he brought his car to a smooth stop a few feet away from her.

How differently from Alester he drove. There was no grinding of brakes, no sliding of wheels or racing motor. But then, she remembered, Dan Harvey was a flyer—a mechanic, possibly. A man who knew the workings of a motor as well as a surgeon knew the human body. A motor would mean more to Dan than to Alester.

He removed his hat and got slowly out of the car. Jerry had an impression that he was being deliberate in his motions. She barely smiled at him. Why had he come back here? His plane was gone. And certainly he hadn't received any encouragement from her. She didn't want him hanging around—he left too deep an imprint in her mind after she'd seen him.

If Dan noticed her inhospitable attitude he gave no sign of it.

"Knew your friend was going to town tonight," he said placidly. "Thought I'd run in and give the place the once over. Picnickers drop in here occasionally."

"At night?" Jerry asked scornfully.

"Sure. Especially on moonlight nights"—he looked

upward—"like this. It's an out-of-the-way place—fine for swimming in abbreviated suits."

"It's nice of you to take so much interest in us," Jerry thanked him. "But you see everything is all right."

Dan ignored the hint. Jerry thought he had a nerve when he came over and sat down on the steps uninvited.

"Mind if I sit a while?" he said, pulling out his pipe and a tobacco pouch.

"I'm not afraid to be alone," Jerry assured him hastily. Then, conscious that her remark was a rebuff, she amended it—"for a little while," she said.

"Expect Miss Crane back soon?" Dan inquired, still retaining his disinterested tone.

Jerry decided to be frank.

"I'm going sailing with Mr. Carstairs," she said abruptly.

Dan did not look at her. She felt that her disclosure had gone flat. And it irritated her. Watching him hold a match to his pipe and puff away at it calmly, she asked herself why she should care that he didn't seem to mind what she had said. No answer came to her. Her irritation grew.

"It's a lovely night to go sailing," she said dreamily, "with someone like Alester."

That ought to bump him! It didn't. The smoke from his pipe blew briskly away but it was the only thing that stirred in his vicinity. His eyes remained looking out at the water.

"Like to sail?" he asked gravely, after a long moment of silence. "It's a dangerous sport," he went on, not waiting for her answer. "If you're not used to swimming in deep water."

Jerry didn't like that. People who flew couldn't be

accused of cowardice, but that was no reason why they should think that other people ought to be warned not to take chances, she told herself. She was thinking only of physical harm.

"I'm sure I'll be perfectly safe with Mr. Carstairs," she answered stiffly.

Dan did not reply. The growing silence was fast becoming uncomfortable when Jerry broke it by excusing herself to retire into the house and change her high-heeled pumps for canvas shoes. They belonged to Myrtle and were too large for her, but Jerry wanted some excuse to get away from Dan.

"You little fool," she arraigned herself. "Why don't you go out and ask him to leave?"

Through the open door she could see his lazily relaxed figure on the steps. Something stirred vaguely in her emotions. She had a feeling that he would sit there through all the ages if he wanted to. She paused in donning the second shoe and let her eyes rest upon him with a faraway expression in them.

He was not a bigger man than Alester Carstairs but Jerry sensed a tremendous potential strength back of the easy grace of his posture. She'd never expected to find any pleasure in just looking at a man, but Dan Harvey, out there in the moonlight, captured her thoughts and held them in a realm of romance.

She liked his wavy dark hair, growing out in a straight line across his forehead with a trueness that gave his face a perpetually well groomed appearance.

And the long sweep of his eyebrows. Too pretty—like a woman's—no, you couldn't say that. A nose and chin like Dan Harvey's would not allow any face that possessed them to be termed feminine. And his skin had a weather-beaten overtone, that was not visible except at

close range, she reminded herself. The sort of skin that belongs to men who spend their lives with boats and dogs and horses . . . and pipes.

Jerry's smooth chin settled down into her cupped hand while her estimation of Dan Harvey led her into strange bypaths of her mind—bypaths that had never before been explored. She had a vision of a man like Dan coming home to a girl who fluttered around in a blue and white kitchen or scurried about getting together slippers and a smelly pipe before a crackling fire.

Good grief! she almost laughed aloud. Where did she get that stuff? Not in this day and age. Why, not even the girls who, like her sister-in-law, Doris, thought that marriage was a bed of roses, got the same domestic kick out of it that their grandmothers had experienced.

And as for her—there wouldn't be any blue and white kitchen—any personal service whatsoever. Instead there'd be an imported chef in a model cooking laboratory, a valet—Jerry thought it was pronounced "valley"—and. . . .

But there she paused. She had been thinking in the abstract—as she had been accustomed to before she met Alester Carstairs. Now all her thoughts of wealth must be associated with him. The force of this realization disturbed Jerry. It was different, thinking about marrying for money when a rich young man was giving you a grand rush.

It seemed more like the way Myrtle had pictured it—cold blooded. Jerry did not understand the influence of the personal element that had entered into it. She knew merely that she couldn't give her mind wholeheartedly to setting her cap for Alester Carstairs.

But she must, he reminded herself, be at the beach to go sailing with him. He ought to be along any minute

now. She thrust her foot hurriedly into Myrtle's shoe, tied the lace and tried vainly to see herself in a small mirror while she powdered her nose.

Dan looked up as she returned to the porch.

"There's The Sprite coming around the point," he said imperturbably. "How are you going to get out to her—the dingey?"

"What is a dingey?" Jerry asked impulsively.

"It's a bigger boat's tender," he explained.

"Thanks," Jerry returned, not fully enlightened.

"Walk down to the water with you?" Dan suggested.

Jerry hesitated. Alester would see him from The Sprite and even if he could not recognize him he'd find out who he was. She'd have to explain a man's presence on the beach unless she wanted Alester to assume that she'd been entertaining someone he knew nothing about.

Jerry didn't like the idea of Alester thinking that anyone could treat her casually—drop in late in the evening, for instance. Dan's excuse for intruding had been plausible enough but she wondered, uneasily, if Alester would suspect that she had asked him to stay. She disliked to seem so free in striking up acquaintances. A man never blamed a girl much for breaking a few conventions with him—it was her behavior with other men that mattered.

Jerry hadn't any concern about Alester's respect for her, but she felt certain that he would consider her common if he suspected that she was the cause of Dan Harvey's presence at the Rolling Stone Inn and his unexpected visit to the camp.

Of course she didn't know that she was the cause. His coming to the inn might have been a coincidence, and the explanation he gave might be the reason why he came here tonight, she reflected.

But would Alester believe it?

Dan could not have been blind to her irresolution, yet he moved to walk down the path with her.

"Please," Jerry said suddenly, "I'd rather you didn't."

Dan stopped in his tracks.

"All right," he agreed.

But something in his voice warned her that all was not right.

"I'll stay and guard the camp until you return, unless your friend gets here first," he said. "You can tell Alester that. He might worry when it comes time to send you ashore."

## CHAPTER X

JERRY was certain that there was an ominous tone in Dan's words—something more than merely a desire to assure Alester of her safety.

Why should Alester worry? He could bring her ashore himself. What, then, was Dan trying to convey? That she needed protection? He had made that pretty plain.

Jerry answered him with a flare of temper.

"What is there to be afraid of, the dark?"

"Well, there's . . . deep water," Dan answered slowly.

Jerry turned her back on him.

"Good night," she called. "Hope you have a pleasant wait."

He had a lot of business appointing himself her personal guardian, she thought. And he wouldn't talk sense.

Deep water!

What had deep water to do with there being someone waiting for her after the sail?

And she would have to tell Alester that Dan had been there. If she didn't, Dan would. She was sure of that.

She reached the water's edge just as the small boat that had put off for her came sliding up on the smooth sands. A man in a white uniform helped her aboard in a respectful silence. A last glance at the house showed Dan again on the steps, looking as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

"Darn him," Jerry thought peevishly; "he's going to jam up everything."

And that was the consensus of all the opinions she formed of him during the remainder of her vacation. He was there, on the steps, when she returned from sailing—sailing on moon-washed water under white, wind-spanked sails.

She knew nothing of nautical terms and paid little attention to the orders that Alester barked to the man who had gone ashore for her in the tender. It was enough for Jerry to thrill to the exhilaration of taking the wind in her face and seeming to glide over the water in a vessel without propulsion.

There had been a queer moment at the start when Alester had reversed an order given only a moment before. Jerry distinctly heard him tell the sailor to row ashore and come out again when he brought the Sprite back. Just then Alester's eyes had fallen upon the figure on the porch steps.

"Who is that?" he asked sharply, turning to Jerry.

"It's Mr. Harvey," she said. "He's taking care of the camp while Myrtle and I are away."

"Here," Alester called to the sailor who was about to shove off, "throw me the painter and come aboard."

Jerry could not understand why he changed his mind about having the man with them. Perhaps he had thought it advisable to have the camp guarded—after all, those were mostly his things in the house.

But it wasn't convincing, the idea of associating caution with Alester Carstairs. Jerry gave it up. She told herself that she would have a fine time indeed if she attempted to analyze everyone's motives.

It was difficult not to try it, however, for Dan gave her many occasions upon which to question his conduct,

and Alester became something of an enigma to her before she moved back to the city.

Dan was always underfoot and Jerry wondered what Alester thought of it. But she soon came to understand why he would tolerate much from Dan Harvey that he did not like. Dan, Jerry learned, was famous as a pilot. He had been engaged to teach Alester to fly. It became plain, even to Jerry, that the progress of the lessons was slow. And before long she discovered that Alester was afraid Dan would give up the job.

This explained only Alester's attitude toward Dan, however. It did not explain Dan's attitude, or Alester's, toward herself, Jerry realized. She knew Alester loved her very much.

He had told her so one night when Myrtle was out with George and she was alone with him. Dan had been called to town on some important business, else he'd have been there, too, she was certain.

They were occupying the swinging hammock Alester had sent over from Carmoor. Myrtle and George got out of sight before Alester took Jerry in his arms and kissed her.

She lay passive and unresisting in his embrace. There was a warmth, a meaning in it that told Jerry it was a climax in their romance. Alester must tell her that he loved her.

He did. He poured his heart out, but it must have been a very small heart for he stopped short of saying words of any real importance to Jerry.

Love! It left her cold.

There was something else he started to say but he did not get far. At the first words Jerry tore herself away from him and ran to the other end of the porch.

"Come on back," he called. "Jerry, please. I don't mean that. I love you. Dear, you know that."

Jerry's fingers gripped the table against which she leaned, breathless and alarmed. She wished blindly, unthinkingly, that Dan Harvey had not gone to New York and left her alone.

Alester came over to her.

"Jerry, don't be afraid of me," he said.

Jerry avoided his eyes.

"Oh, my lord," he cried and crushed her to him in an instant. "Why don't you love me, Jerry? I'm mad about you!"

Jerry tried to push him away. He would not release her. Jerry thought, frantically, that he might let her go if she returned his kisses.

She turned her face slightly . . . no, no, she couldn't, she didn't want to kiss him. She had thought of marrying this man and yet she could not further this aim by giving him kisses that were not inspired by affection. If she'd loved him . . . but she would never love anyone . . . she couldn't.

"Let me go," she sobbed. "Alester, let me go."

Perhaps he knew that conquest was remote; the knowledge may have cooled his ardor. At any rate he loosed his hold and Jerry slipped away from his arms to disappear into the house.

She came to the door a few minutes later when she heard his retreating footsteps. Now she had lost him. Her golden chance had gone glimmering because she could not take the first step toward surrender.

Surely he knew that she would have yielded her kisses had she loved him. What man would want to marry a girl who resisted his caresses? She knew this much from

talks with other girls—there was the kiss and then the proposal.

Myrtle found her in her cot and thought she was asleep, but Jerry lay awake far into the night thinking of the disaster that had befallen her ambition. She saw, through a vision cleared by experience, that she could not hunt out a man of wealth and parade her beauty before him as a fisherman uses his net to catch a fish.

She'd have said yes if Alester had asked her to marry him. Why, oh why, hadn't she thought before it was too late of all the things that she wanted money for?

She didn't expect Alester to return, but he did. Nothing seemed to have happened. He told her again that he loved her—told her many times, until Jerry believed it. But he said nothing more beyond that. He gave her no hint of what his love meant.

Jerry was puzzled.

And, strangely, soon after that night Dan stopped coming to the camp. Jerry was tempted more than once to ask Alester about him but she noticed that when he spoke of Dan his expression was not pleasant.

Could they have quarreled? Surely not over her? Why should they? Jerry was certain it couldn't be, but nevertheless she avoided further reference to the young aviator.

And she found that she missed his presence. His dark self and inscrutable silences had been too deeply imprinted in her memory for her to forget them.

But whatever emotion she felt over his absence was overshadowed by the rapidly approaching end of her vacation. She had had a glorious time. And now she must go back to her counter—a Cinderella of the laces.

There was something pleasant to think about after-

ward, however, Alester had made her promise not to throw him down on the night of Leontine's party.

They'd had dinner at the Rolling Stone Inn several times since that first time together, and Leontine had made Jerry feel quite at home. She had forgotten her first impression of Miss Lebaudy. The party would be something to look forward to when ill-humored customers tried her patience.

On the day Jerry and Myrtle were leaving the old house Dan came to say goodby. It was a Sunday and George and Myrtle had gone to store the few things Myrtle had left from the crash in a garage belonging to a friend of his.

Jerry was alone, busy with her packing. All the lovely things she had planned to wear in Atlantic City had been used now, and each brought to her mind a gay hour with Alester . . . drives, swims, teas, dinners, dances. . . .

The sound of Dan's car driving in at the gate startled her. But she was more startled by the glad leap of her heart.

## CHAPTER XI

DAN was changed.

Jerry noticed it at once. His unshakable calm seemed shaken at last. But she saw also that it had not given way to anything approaching Alester's ease of manner. There was a suggestion of mental strain etched into his features; and he looked at her with an expression that reminded Jerry of the first time she saw him—when she opened her eyes after the crash and found her head pillowed in the crook of his strong arm.

"Hello," she said, outwardly casual but aware that his presence had stirred her. "Where have you been?" It was said in a light vein of banter but she waited eagerly for an answer.

"Busy," Dan said disappointingly.

So! He wasn't going to be any more communicative than usual.

"Well, you almost missed us; we're leaving in a little while."

"Yes, I know," Dan said, and Jerry was sure she detected a note of relief in his voice. "Ran over to ask if I could drive you to town."

Jerry was taken by surprise.

"Why . . . why," she stammered; "I . . ."

"Alester's tied up at home," Dan broke in brusquely.

Jerry's cleft chin came up a haughty inch.

"I wasn't depending upon him," she said stiltedly;

"I'm going in with Miss Crane and her boy friend."

"Why crowd them when there's room in my car?" he countered insistently.

"Oh, were you going in anyway?" Jerry's voice dropped a note. His invitation wasn't so flattering, after all.

Dan did not follow her thought, but when he answered Jerry's elation was restored.

"No, but I'd be glad to if you'd go with me," he said truthfully.

Jerry was thinking it over. Yes, she would crowd Myrtle and George in his small car and they had the suitcases. . . .

Three made a crowd, too, and Myrtle and George were awfully spoony. . . .

Another thought came to Jerry suddenly. When she left Long Island she might never see Dan Harvey again, unless he knew where to find her and would come to her. Of course she didn't want to see him—just a casual summer acquaintance—but there was something so final about parting with people and not having even their telephone number. . . .

"George says it's terrible driving in to New York on Sunday nights," she said. She wouldn't let him know too quickly that she was going to accept his offer.

"Will you go with me?" Dan returned directly.

"Yes," Jerry said.

In a way it was a relief not to have to pretend and beat around the bush as you did with so many boys. Usually if you said yes right out they thought they had you going, she reflected with youthful wisdom.

Jerry was not sorry for the decision she reached. The drive into the city in spite of the terrific jams at cross-roads and on the Queensboro Bridge, was more pleasant

than she had anticipated. Dan seemed to have left his forbidding gruffness behind.

Jerry would have been astonished had she been able to read his mind and to know how happy he was to be taking her away from Alester Carstairs' vicinity.

And still more startling to her would have been the story Dan could have told of the session he had had with Alester, and the promise he had wrung from his employer to "pick on some girl who was out to be picked on."

After this stormy meeting Dan had ceased to make a watchdog of himself. He believed that Alester would not seek Jerry in New York.

When they arrived at Jerry's rooming house Jerry noticed that Dan kept his eyes fixed on the number over the door. Memorizing it probably. He carried her suitcases up the dark stairs, but Jerry did not ask him into her room. It wasn't allowed, yet Jerry did not fret about it for in many ways she was strictly conventional.

They stood a moment outside Jerry's open door after Dan had put down the suitcases just inside the threshold. Jerry put out her hand to say good night. Dan took it, pressed it gently, and Jerry thrilled to the feel of his strong fingers. Alester's hand was soft, she remembered.

"Come out to dinner with me," Dan said suddenly, and Jerry felt sure that he was reluctant to leave her. It was as though his invitation were a last minute device to postpone saying the inevitable good night.

"Wait in your car until I change my dress," she said, unaware that she was radiantly displaying her innermost feelings in her glowing countenance.

When she came down the outer steps a few minutes later Dan advanced to meet her. With the first compliment he had ever paid her.

"I thought you were pretty the first time I saw you,"

he said; "but tonight it's a pity that Ziegfeld can't see you. There's a million dollars in your smile."

Jerry halted abruptly.

"Oh," she said, and Dan thought he had displeased her. To Jerry his words were a mirror through which she stepped back into the world he had made her forget.

Yes, her smile was to bring her a fortune; she must remember that.

And all through the dinner on a sky-tipping roof garden Jerry tried to keep her mind on her avowed purpose in life.

But she must not allow herself to dream dreams about the man who sat across the table from her—an intimately small table.

Thoughts of money caused her to question Dan's prudence in bringing her here to an expensive hotel. After all he was a wage earner. He worked for his money just as she did. But of course he must be able to afford a "spread" once in a while. Almost anybody could.

But the girl who married Dan Harvey would probably be just like Doris and her mother and a dozen others she knew, after a few years. Kitchen slaves!

Dan wondered why Jerry's radiance became dimmed. And by the time he took her home he was convinced that, whether she cared for Alester or not, she certainly was not in love with him.

Jerry half expected him to try to kiss her good night. That seemed to be the usual procedure of the boys she'd grown up with. But not so with Dan. He left her without lingering over his departure.

"Well, that's that," she told herself up in her room. Dan had said nothing about wanting to see her again. She did not believe he would try.

Curious how flat the future seemed, even with Alester

in a glittering sphere of possibility. Alester! Well, he'd fallen for her even if Dan hadn't. Jerry smiled wanly. She thought of the crash that had changed her world. Fallen was right. But would it do her any good?

Perhaps she wasn't smart enough for Alester. He admired Leontine. She knew that. And Leontine was smart. Jerry looked at herself in the mirror. She had put on her prettiest frock to dine with Dan but she realized that it lacked something.

It wasn't chic in that distinctly Parisian way that gave class to Leontine's clothes. And Leontine had the proper accessories—odd things to match her exotic beauty.

But thoughts of Alester and Leontine could not survive in competition with her thoughts of Dan. The first day back at Fane's Jerry found herself thinking more of the past than of the future. The continuity of her thoughts might have been unbroken had not a necessity of the present thrust itself upon her attention. She must consider what she would wear at Leontine's party. It was only two days distant now—on Friday. And this was Wednesday.

Alester had come to see her on Tuesday night to remind her of the affair. He had again brought up the subject of an evening gown for her. Jerry detoured. She had heard her brother say once that men didn't respect girls they could buy clothes for. Alester had to respect her, Jerry told herself fiercely.

"I'm getting a new dress," she told him proudly and even looked him straight in the eye.

After this declaration of independence she faced a real problem. Alester might be sore, she feared, if she made him ashamed of her appearance after refusing his aid.

Altogether it had been a bad day for her, but by night she had thought of a solution that was so simple she wondered why it hadn't occurred to her before. She had to wait until Myrtle came in from the movies, though, before she could be sure she wasn't taking anything for granted.

"Listen, Myrtle," she cried excitedly as soon as her roommate opened the door. "I want to borrow some of that money Alester gave you. If I don't have a decent dress for Miss Lebaudy's party I can't go. I'll pay it back a little each week like I saved that money for Atlantic City!"

She looked expectantly at her friend. And Myrtle's face slowly took on an expression that killed her hopes.

## CHAPTER XII

"GEE, Jerry, I'm sorry," Myrtle burst out in answer to her roommate's questions. "I lent George all that money to be a silent partner in a hotdog stand. He and that fellow whose garage he uses are starting a place on the Jericho Turnpike. Gee, I'm sorry if you counted on me to help you out. You know I would if I could."

Myrtle felt grieved at that moment for Jerry because she looked so crestfallen. Then, it being Myrtle's way to become cross when her sympathy was deeply touched, she said: "If you can't go to that blowout it's your guardian angel keeping you from it. First thing you know you'll be losing your head over Alester Carstairs."

Jerry smiled unsteadily. She understood Myrtle. Her friend's remark did not upset her but it was a blow not to get the money. Now she hadn't the slightest idea what to do.

Myrtle asked abruptly a little later why she couldn't cut the sleeves out of her printed chiffon afternoon dress and wear it to the party. Jerry's depression was calling too strongly for a friend's help to be ignored however much she was in the wrong about the whole thing.

"Oh, I couldn't Myrtle! You ought to see the people who go to the Rolling Stone Inn. Alester would be ashamed of me . . . a lot of his friends will be there. . . ."

"Humph!" Myrtle interjected scornfully. "George

told me about the kind of people who go there. I'll bet any of his friends you meet there never get a foot inside his house. . . ." she stopped abruptly. Jerry's face was flaming.

"Well," Myrtle went on defiantly, "maybe they're not all fast. Some of them might not know any more about the place than you do. But if I were you I'd keep away from the Rolling Stone Inn."

"I never saw anything out of the way," Jerry replied defensively. "I guess Miss Lebaudy knows her way to the jeweler's all right, but she's popular and I never heard anyone say anything against her. You needn't worry about me, though. I guess I won't go."

Her voice held a poignant regret that stopped Myrtle from saying anything further on the subject of Alester Carstairs and the Lebaudy roadhouse. She saw a tear gleaming in Jerry's eyes as she brushed her hair before the best preserved side of the mirror. The other side had lost its quicksilver in several places.

This surely would be the end with Alester, Jerry was telling herself. A girl couldn't break a promise to him. Maybe a fascinating woman like Leontine Lebaudy could do anything she wanted with him, but an obscure little shopgirl. . . .

She wished she could tell herself that she didn't like him anyway, but that wasn't being honest with herself. She just simply couldn't. She did like him. But why hadn't she fallen head over heels in love with Dan Harvey? That would have settled everything—well, not everything, but at least she couldn't think of marrying one man while she was in love with another.

Jerry went to sleep feeling sorry for herself and began to dream of a young man she wanted to forget—a man with dark hair and deep blue-gray eyes.

She woke in the middle of the night, smiling softly in the warm darkness, and for the first time in her life she was near to the point of admitting that riches were not all that mattered—that wealth was not the greatest goal in life.

Myrtle was surprised the next morning to find her cheerful as they dressed for work. Jerry's disappointment at the prospect of not going to the party had disappeared. If Alester wanted to drop her for this—well, let him. She wasn't going to have kept him guessing any longer. He'd told her too many times that he loved her and let it go at that.

She was quite gay until they stopped in the lower hall for their mail, on their way out to breakfast. It was to be coffee and doughnuts in a coffee house this morning. There was only one letter for her—from her mother. Jerry eagerly tore it open at once. She remembered guiltily that she hadn't written to her mother a word about her vacation except a few brief messages on some postcards.

Myrtle went on ahead. Jerry began the letter with her usual presentiment of bad news from home. Her mother's letters were never cheerful, though Jerry was sure she tried to make them so.

"Jerry, dearest," she read. "Honey, why haven't you written me? I'm worried about you. You know you promised to write often and Harry tells me such dreadful things that he's heard about New York. I'm so afraid something will happen to you. Of course, child, I don't blame you for leaving us, but Jerry sweet, I just couldn't stand it if any harm came to you.

"Write soon, and let me know if you receive the box of cookies I'm sending you. I wanted to make you a nice dimity nightgown—I got the material—but Doris

wanted it so bad to make a dress for her layette I couldn't refuse her. Harry hasn't had much work lately but I can't help them a great deal. Your pa is ailing again—it's that lumbago—and has to sit in the sun most of the time. Mr. Shears wanted him to work on a job but he was feeling a little better that day and had gone fishing. Mr. Shears came again in the evening but your pa had got worse. But he manages to pay the rent and we have enough to eat, so I suppose I shouldn't complain.

"I was having pretty good luck with my laying hens until the rats from that old warehouse down the street got to eating the eggs. And the dry weather has just about ruined my lavender bed. I was going to make it up in little bags for the woman's exchange to sell but I planted it down near the end of the lot and Harry took the hose over to his place to wash his car—he bought a second hand one cheap—and your pa told him he could keep it. I carried water for a few days but my dizzy spells came on again and I had to give it up.

"But I was fortunate to get a chance to take care of Mrs. Shears' children while she went over to Miller's Ferry to visit her sister Alice who had an operation. . . ."

Jerry crumpled the letter with a sudden passion of fury. Her father's lumbago! Did her mother still believe in that old bromide? And Harry taking the hose—he'd always taken things.

"Oh, Mom," she cried under her breath, "how they do abuse you! And I was going to do so much for you—and all I've done is to add to your worries while I had a swell time playing around with a man who could give me enough to make life easy for you. . . ."

Jerry reached into her bag and got out a handkerchief to dab at her brimming eyes.

Myrtle, waiting for her in the coffee house, looked anx-

iously at the clock on the wall, and finished her second doughnut in haste. She couldn't wait any longer. No sense in both of them being late.

Jerry went to her job without breakfast. She had lost her appetite and her cheerfulness. Her mother's letter had taken her back to Marblehead, to the sordid conditions that had driven her away from home. And being away she had nearly forgotten. She had now been on the verge of letting her golden opportunity slip by because . . . no man could buy her a dress and . . . yes, because she had dreamed half the night about a young man she had dined with on a starry roof garden. . . .

Jerry smiled a hard little smile. She must stop thinking about Dan Harvey now and forever. And somehow, somehow she must get a dress. Leontine Lebaudy must not outshine her—not on that one night. She would light her eyes with the stars of hope, and brush her hair until it became a golden snare to catch a man's heart. If her lips were not red enough she would color them with the brightest carmine. . . .

"And Alester will want me," she told a thrilling heart. "I'll be irresistible. It will be my night and then, Mom, you can sit in the sun."

It was all very easy to declare these things. To accomplish them—well, that was something different. All that day Jerry racked her brain in vain.

She considered many expedencies. She thought of sending a message to Alester telling him that she needed him. When he came in answer to her summons she could explain—make up some plausible story—to obtain enough money for that dress.

No, it wouldn't do! She hadn't made herself cheap. It had been her pride before; it was a matter of calculating policy now. There must be some other way!

"Girls, we've got a big sale on tomorrow," the head of her department announced just before closing time. "Be sure and read our ad in the papers."

At the newsstand where they bought their papers Myrtle grumbled about the sale.

"Some imported lace tunics," she muttered; "they'll move like a ton of bricks with everybody wearing printed materials."

Tunics! Women wore them like dresses!

Jerry had a staggering thought

She wouldn't be poor! She wouldn't!

## CHAPTER XIII

THE big, white-pillared store hummed with pre-opening activity.

The outer doors were thrown back to the public—the early shoppers and bargain hunters who pressed against the barrier ropes that would not be let down by the aisle men until the nine o'clock bell struck.

At the various counters girls were busy putting merchandise out for display, accompanying their movements with a running chatter of overnight confidences.

One of these girls was silent, a little terrified, but determined to follow her plans through. It was wrong, yes, but so much was at stake. There were extenuating circumstances. And no one would be harmed. She would be very careful. . . .

Jerry picked up a cobwebby affair and glanced quickly at the size mark.

Sixteen! It was just what she wanted, but she couldn't take it now. Too bad. Some of the tunics were one of a kind. She folded it quickly and piled it up with others in the neat rows on the counter.

It was unnecessary work, she considered, but the head of the department was particular. Five minutes after the barriers were down the counter would present a scene of such disorder as to make you weep.

It did. The sale had been well advertised. Jerry watched the grabbing, pawing hands with a strong de-

sire to speak her mind about those who owned them. But the customer was always right. That had been thoroughly drilled into her rebellious little head after one woman had complained of her for asking that she pick up a lace scarf the customer had dropped to the floor and was stepping on.

The eager pulling and digging became harder to bear when greedy hands reached for the tunic that Jerry had marked for herself. She was going to borrow that dress for the party, that is, if it remained unsold. There were others like it but none size 16. And the rest of the tunics were of heavy lace—things she could not possibly slip into her handbag.

Two of the lighter tunics were sold immediately and Jerry's heart fell. The one she wanted would surely be the next to go. Then, unaccountably, the tide of favor turned to the coarser pieces. And as the day wore on and the tunic she wanted for one precious night remained unsold on the counter she began to maneuver to discourage its sale. Each time it threatened to become exposed on top of the heap she deftly thrust it deeper, if she could.

And by four o'clock, one hour before closing time, Jerry's tunic was still there. But she had begun to weaken. Of course she would return it in the morning undamaged and unsoiled. But suppose someone saw her taking it. Prying eyes were about. She would be accused to stealing. What a terrible mess she'd be in. Jerry Ray—a common thief!

"Some more returns for you," a stock girl grinned at her as she dumped an armful of merchandise down on the counter. Jerry regarded the stuff with a scowl. That was the worst of being paid in commissions. Things came back—especially from charge customers.

And you didn't know anything about it half the time. Unless the customer paid cash. Then she had to talk to the aisle men. And no matter how tactfully he tried to refuse he always had to take the goods back. Even when it was the safest guess in the world that they had been worn. If Jerry had seen this happen once she had seen it happen a hundred times.

She picked up the things the stock girl had returned and put them away. There was a lull at her end of the counter. She remembered ruefully that she had spent nearly half an hour with the woman who had bought the lace bertha. It was an expensive piece and had brought Jerry's book for the day up to a good figure. Before the sale was completed she had worried over the report she must make at the end of the day. Usually, about four o'clock, the girls began to whisper to one another:

"What you got?" "I've had fierce luck." "I'm sitting pretty for old pain-in-the-face." "Well, I'm not, but I should worry."

These and similar remarks were freely given until the store's bell heralded the end of another working day. The return of the bertha was the straw that broke down Jerry's resistance. If customers could borrow things from the store why couldn't she. There wasn't a girl in her department who had worked so hard. And she was punctual. She was loyal. She had spent her own money there, too. Why, she was a customer, herself, even if she hadn't a charge account. And she wouldn't be depriving the store of a chance to sell the tunic if she waited until closing time to take it out, and brought it back in the morning.

She wished she hadn't tried to hide it earlier in the day. But at least it was there if anyone had dug for it.

And some people kept things out for days and weeks even before returning them.

The store closed at five during the summer months. Those 60 endless minutes between four and five were a nightmare to Jerry. In spite of all she told herself she couldn't shake off a sense of guilt.

But she had to have the tunic!

It was easy to take it. She simply folded it up and put it in her bag—the old felt bag she had made from a hat in imitation of an import. There was a rule against keeping bags at the counter but it was a dead letter—it was ignored so often. No one noticed her take the tunic. Her action was screened by the last minute hustle and bustle so familiar at closing time.

The man at the employe's door set her heart to thumping hard as his eye fell upon the bag tucked under her arm. If it looked suspicious he would stop her, she knew. But he only smiled—most people who knew and dealt with Jerry smiled at her—and said good night very pleasantly.

Outside the door she turned weak, her knees trembled and her hands felt numb for a moment. Myrtle was with her.

"What's the matter, kid?" she asked, alarmed.

But Jerry recovered her composure.

"Nothing," she said, moving on. "I'm just excited about the party."

"Oh, so you're going? I thought you gave it up."

"I couldn't," Jerry replied; "it means too much to me."

Myrtle remained silent, but she looked decidedly out of sympathy with Jerry's change of mind.

Jerry did not tell her about the tunic. Myrtle would

go out with George before it was time for her to dress, she hoped, and make it unnecessary to reveal what she had done.

They had dinner together at the nearest restaurant and hurried home where Myrtle took time only to change her dress and shoes before she went out again to meet George. Jerry was glad to know he wasn't coming to the house for her tonight. Myrtle's disapproving silence was getting on her nerves. She felt relieved when her friend left.

Alester came for her at nine o'clock. Jerry had lingered long over her toilette. She had bathed and given herself a "facial" as best she could. Her hair shone bright as polished amber. Her dainty feet were encased in slippers she had bought at a basement sale. They were painted with silver. High-priced slippers originally, they were reduced because their white satin had become soiled. They made Jerry's feet look as exquisitely shod as ever she had seen Leontine's. And the tunic fitted as perfectly as if it had been made for her by a Fifth Avenue modiste.

Jerry was about to powder her neck and arms when she remembered having read of a smart fashion on the Riviera. Modish women were wearing white with ochre makeup. Her own skin was sunburned to a deep tan. The white, sleeveless tunic with its deep V in the back would show it off beautifully, she realized.

Alester ought to approve of that. He was denied the opportunity, however, to admire her when she came down to him for Jerry was wearing a light summer coat that concealed her dress and all that it revealed.

One glance at her slippers satisfied him that she was in evening clothes. He grasped her hands eagerly. Jerry's beauty always moved him.

But a shopgirl . . . his family simply wouldn't have it! Neither was he so keen on a mesalliance himself . . . if only Jerry would be reasonable, or if only he could forget her. . . .

"You need nothing more to make you lovelier," he said, "but I've brought you some flowers."

When Jerry was seated in the car—the black roadster—he handed her a ribbon-tied box. She opened it eagerly and for an instant it seemed to Jerry that she must be dreaming. Surely she was not merely a little shopgirl going to a party in a dress she did not own. Orchids were for first ladies, the wives of public men or favorites of the stage and screen. Women who were snapped for the rotogravure pages wore orchids on the Avenue—she had seen them.

Orchids, in Jerry's eyes, were the symbol of luxury. And Alester had given her three! They cost at least—she'd heard—twenty-five dollars apiece!

Jerry caught her breath in sheer ecstasy. It was the first time in her life that superlative beauty had been showered upon her. She could not help thrilling to it and to the thought that Alester wanted to make her happy.

He was starting the car. She looked up at him with dewy eyes.

"Thank you," they seemed to say.

He looked around and caught the expression. Her lips uttered what her eyes had seemed to say. Alester smiled with deep satisfaction.

"So she likes orchids," he thought. "That ought to make you feel good, Mr. Alester Carstairs."

## CHAPTER XIV

IT WAS after 10 o'clock before Alester and Jerry arrived at the Rolling Stone Inn. Traffic had delayed them and Alester drove cautiously for brilliant headlights coming from the opposite direction interfered with his usually fast driving. Once when he had a clear field ahead he stepped on it only to be hailed a few minutes later by a motorcycle cop who had been lying in ambush behind the walls of a hotdog stand.

"Let you go this time," the officer of the law asserted after he had forced Alester to the side of the road. "Next time you'll have to tell it to the judge."

A little later, when he had rounded a corner, Alester was again speeding up the tree-lined highway at 50 miles an hour.

The party had not really begun, though, Leontine told her when Jerry came up to her rooms to take off her wrap. She had left word downstairs that Jerry was to come up to her boudoir instead of being directed to the dressing-room reserved for her private guests.

Leontine had an object in thus favoring Jerry. She wanted to have a private talk with her.

"You're lovely," she said admiringly when Jerry doffed her coat.

Jerry warmed to her praise. The evening was starting out beautifully.

"But you really need a few jewels," Leontine went

on critically. "Your costume is too sophisticated to be unadorned."

"Wait," Jerry said as she turned to the box which she had carried her orchids upstairs. She brought them out triumphantly and held them against her dress. Leontine's eyes narrowed the least bit.

"Exquisite," she said softly. Then she laughed. "I expected to see lilies of the valley or pansies," she explained.

Jerry regarded her suspiciously. There had been a touch of mockery in Leontine's voice.

"Why?" she asked simply.

Leontine waved her long cigaret negligently in a circle.

"Because, my dear," she said sweetly, "that is what I thought Alester believed would suit you. I'm glad to see it isn't—if you value his affection—because Alester despises simplicity."

Jerry turned to gaze at herself in the mirror. Leontine was right. She did look sophisticated. The tunic was very low in the back and very short at her knees. And she had painted her lips a daring Cupid's bow, drawing out the lines at the corners so that their natural rosebud outlines would give way to an older, and, she thought, more alluring appearance.

But Leontine's remarks about Alester worried her. Did he think her simple? She knew he liked dashing, up-to-date girls. He had said so. But she knew she attracted him!

She attracted him—yes. But she had not captivated him. And she couldn't continue indefinitely waiting for him to propose marriage to her. She would have to spend all her meager earnings on clothes; even then she wouldn't be properly dressed for his company. And she must send something to her mother. . . .

"Where shall I pin them?" she asked Leontine, lifting the flowers to her shoulder.

"A little higher," Leontine suggested. "Would you like me to lend you a necklace?"

Jerry wanted to laugh. Fane's dress—Alester's corsage—and now Leontine wanted her to wear borrowed jewels.

"No, thanks very much," she said nervously. "But I forgot perfume"—a little lie; she hadn't any.

Leontine brought her an atomizer and Jerry sprayed herself liberally. Leontine smiled. She guessed that Jerry thought she was using toilet water.

"Now," Jerry rejoiced to herself, "at least I won't smell like violet talcum powder."

"I must run down and see how things are going in the kitchen," Leontine said. "Ready?"

Jerry followed her to the door. There Leontine paused and faced her.

"I'd like to give you a friendly tip," she said with evident hesitation. "I'm interested in you, Jerry. Now don't misunderstand me," she went on hurriedly, "because I'm going to be frank. I don't believe you'd be running around with Alester Carstairs unless you had something serious at the back of your head."

She came to a full stop but Jerry remained silent. She was too surprised to find words to answer.

"Well," Leontine continued, "if you are serious you will have to hit Alester a little harder where he's weakest. I've never known him to fall for an ingénue yet. You'll have to snap out of it, Jerry. Be like the other girls. A drink won't hurt you—only make it easier to put yourself across. Everyone should take something at a party. It makes the other people feel better. No one likes a teetotaler around to be criticizing."

Jerry was plainly embarrassed.

"I'm not critical," she denied stoutly. "But a girl friend of mine got . . . got drunk once and her father nearly beat her to death. I'm afraid to drink."

Leontine shrugged.

"Good heavens; you don't need to dry up the ocean. Just be a good fellow and take a cocktail or two. You will if you don't want Alester to think you're a back number."

Jerry remembered that. But she wouldn't accept any of the drinks that were pressed upon her until a group of Alester's acquaintances began ragging her about her sobriety.

She could see that Alester did not like it. She did not know that Leontine had told him something that wasn't true—that several of her guests had complained of Jerry's resenting their efforts to help her enjoy herself.

"You might suggest to her that this isn't a nunnery," she had added peevishly.

"Why don't you try a silver fizz?" Alester said to Jerry later on at a large table where they sat after dancing. He had noticed that the others at the board waited expectantly for Jerry's answer when the waiter came for their orders. He had no desire to have undue attention directed at her. They might start a story about him and Jerry—a story that would reach his father's ears, he feared. And if his father knew that he had brought a nice girl here. . . .

"It's hardly more than an ice cream soda," he went on reassuringly.

"He thinks I'm a wet blanket," Jerry told herself in chagrin. "Maybe he wishes he hadn't brought me."

She glanced up at him appealingly. He was frowning. Jerry's dissimilarity to the girls he'd sought heretofore

was losing its savor for Alester. He was glad she'd been straightlaced until he met her but to continue it wouldn't add anything to her allure in his eyes, he was thinking.

He motioned the waiter.

"Bring a silver fizz," he ordered.

Jerry put a hand on his arm.

"Please, tell him not to make it very strong," she begged, and Alester instructed the waiter as she wished.

The crowd set up a great roar when it saw the tall glass placed before Jerry. She was toasted roundly and one of the group leaped to the table and sang a foolish little song with words that said goodby to the water wagon.

As Jerry drank it she revealed no sign of her distaste for it. Over the glass she looked into Alester's eyes and saw a gleam there that she believed meant approval. She put the glass down and smiled at him. And when his hand came searching for hers under the table she met it and held it.

She wanted to laugh at herself for having been afraid. Why, she didn't feel the drink at all!

Alester ordered another after a short wait. She heard him tell the waiter to make it light. It was half consumed when she saw Dan Harvey striding across the room to their table. There were storm clouds all over his face. He glanced at the glass as she put it down, and then at Alester. He knew instantly what Jerry hadn't as yet realized—that Alester had been drinking too much.

Jerry thought Dan was going to stop and join them but he said good evening, just civilly, hesitated uncertainly and passed on. Alester looked after him with a darkening countenance.

"Damned impudence coming here," she heard him

mutter and knew that Dan at least had not been invited by Alester.

She saw him take a seat at a small table over in a corner, with some people she did not know. He was facing her and intuitively she felt that he was savagely disapproving when she lifted the glass to her lips. Well, it wasn't any of his business.

She drained the glass.

Very soon Jerry had ample proof that the drink wasn't so innocuous as she had thought. She felt a desire to droop over the table. All the life had gone out of her.

"Hey, you can't pass out," someone cried. "I want to dance with you."

Jerry felt herself rudely jerked upright. She looked about for Alester. He was gone, and a young satyr with a foolish cap jauntily tilted on his head was pulling at her.

"She's out," Jerry heard a girl shrill. "Let her alone."

"Out?" the boy repeated. "She can't pull anything like that. Let's bring her to. Here Susie, take hold of her feet. I'm going to give this little girl a bath."

Jerry was lifted, struggling ineffectually, and carried out through a French window to the garden. Suddenly she remembered the pool she had seen there. Her mind was clear, only her hands were numb. She could not resist, and they were bearing her straight to the garden pool!

## CHAPTER XV

JERRY opened her mouth to call for help but someone smothered the cry by placing a hand over her lips. She heard the laughter of several persons. A small crowd had followed her abductors.

When they reached the edge of the pool, laughing, shouting, Jerry felt herself lifted high and given an upward toss. Then the sickening descent.

Splash!

When she struck the water she was stunned but not before she had heard a cry of dismay and several grunts of pain issue from her tormentors.

The cold water revived Jerry in a few seconds. She began to choke and flounder helplessly around in the shallow pool. An arm suddenly reached forth and pulled her out.

Someone slapped her heartily on the back. She coughed harder, and found relief. Then it seemed to her that a pair of hands seized her by the shoulders and shook her. She could have sworn that she heard this person mutter:

"You little fool," in a hoarse whisper.

The sound of splashing attracted her attention to the pool. She saw the young satyr, with his foolish cap, crawling out upon the grass. The hands on her shoulders were removed and the man on the ground scrambled quickly away on his hands and knees, with a ludicrous

expression of fear on his backward turned countenance.

Jerry lifted her face to her rescuer.

It was Dan!

She had known it even without the necessity of verifying it. He was removing his coat. Jerry made no protest when he wrapped it around her shoulders. She could guess that his opinion of her was not flattering, but she was too grateful for his protection to show that she suspected it.

"I'm going to take you out of this," he said.

Jerry shivered and swayed toward him.

"Jerry," his voice came thick with emotion. "Jerry, I love you."

Again Jerry was robbed of her breath. She couldn't move. And Dan's kisses ran like a warm, delicious stream from her lips to her heart, almost bursting it with a strange exultation she never had known before.

But there was no answering pressure to satisfy him. Jerry's eyes were closed, her lips were still. She was held in the grip of a great awakening—an awakening that brought dismay, complete and devastating, to replace the pæan of joy that Dan had set to ringing in her heart.

She knew what was happening to her . . . she had been afraid of this since love first became a word of meaning to her. But no, no, she wouldn't—she mustn't. It meant ruin. It was a mirage that cost you dearly if you yielded to its temptation.

Dan drew his face away from her.

"Wait here for me," he said quickly. "I'll get your wrap and drive you back to New York. You can't go in there with that crowd again!"

Jerry was rather unceremoniously seated on a bench and left there while Dan hurried toward the inn. She raised a shaking hand to her lips and pressed hard

against them, to still their trembling. She was cold and frightened . . . her beautiful evening had become a nightmare—a nightmare with a ray of purest sunshine piercing through the hideous remorse and terror that enveloped her.

Why had she let them tease her into drinking? They must be laughing even now at the undignified manner in which she had been helped to overcome the effects of it—all, that is, except those who had encountered Dan's wrath.

She turned hot and cold again as she thought of the prospect of the episode reaching Alester's ears, as surely it must. Would he think she had been . . . had been . . . Jerry balked at the horror of the word in relation to herself . . . that she hadn't known what they were doing to her?

Her hands dropped to her lap. The contact with her wet clothing brought a new consternation.

The tunic! it was ruined!

Jerry slumped down on the bench and began to cry, her nerves completely unstrung. First, shock, then rapture, and now, disaster! She was sobbing heart-brokenly when Alester found her.

He had caught a word or two about the event at the pool before Dan came rushing in on his way to the dressing room.

"What's happened?" Alester asked, catching hold of a young man with dripping clothes who was slinking by.

"Some blankety blank fool had to spoil a little fun we were having with your girl. . . ."

"Where?"

The other tore himself away without answering. He'd had enough of chaps with no sense of humor. Someone laughed. "Perky got a bath himself."

"Yes, and a sweet kiss on the chin besides."

Alester ran out to the garden. He needed to know no more to guess what that "little fun" had been.

Jerry—it was a bedraggled and tearful Jerry—told him what had happened. When she explained that Dan was inside looking for her coat Alester interrupted grimly.

"I'll take you home," he said. "Harvey didn't bring you here. He needn't be so officious. Where did you leave your wrap?"

"Upstairs, in Miss Lebaudy's room," Jerry answered diffidently. She was too upset, too confused, to know what to do.

"Come with me, then," Alester replied, "around to the side entrance. I'll get your wrap."

They were gone when Dan returned to the garden to report to Jerry that he had been unable to get her coat from the attendant in the dressing room, and to ask if she had a check. He found his own coat on the bench and thought Jerry might have walked off down the path and collapsed.

The sound of a motor—a motor that he instantly recognized—purring among the parked cars not far away drew his eyes in that direction. There was a light there. He could see Alester's black roadster pull out and start for the highway. And in the seat beside the driver he could see a huddled figure that he knew must be Jerry.

"I'd better take you some place and get you a drink," Alester said to Jerry before they had gone far.

Jerry shuddered.

"No, no. I never want another drink as long as I live! Please take me straight home."

"Oh, come now, Jerry. Don't be a bum sport. As

long as you aren't hurt there's nothing to get sore about. Things like that happen at the best regulated parties. I'm sorry I left you but I . . . er . . . Leontine had a few people upstairs and I didn't think you would care to join us. . . ."

His voice trailed off in his sheer inability to drag the lie out any further. But Jerry was too distraught to weigh his words. She did not suspect that he had been alone with Leontine.

Alester was making excuses now only because he thought her refusal to accompany him to another road-house was prompted by pique over being abandoned to the mercy of his hilarious friends.

"I'm cold in these wet clothes," Jerry said, her teeth beginning to chatter. "Take me home."

She spoke pleadingly because she hadn't either the strength or the will power to be assertive.

"I know a cure for that," Alester answered. "We'll stop at Carmoor and I'll get a dress for you from my sister's room."

"But I want to go home," Jerry wailed. "I've had enough . . . fun."

Alester drove on in silence. Jerry didn't know what he was going to do, and her helplessness to combat him started her to sobbing again. He glanced down at her, frowning.

"All right," he gave in; "it isn't necessary to cry."

But Jerry's sobs continued, low and painful, while the black roadster tore along at a furious pace on the country roads. She was glad Alester didn't want to talk to her. His silence, if indicative of anger, failed to add anything to her troubles. She felt crushed as it was. Falling in love with a man she would not marry—and faced with a situation that might land her in prison!

Alester's sullenness passed unnoticed. At her door he said good night to her very stiffly. Poor Jerry was aware of his coldness, but she had no heart to make an effort to placate him. The shadow of her impending ordeal at Fane's obscured everything else.

His own guilty conscience had not a little to do with Alester's ill humor. The fact that through his neglect of Jerry, Dan Harvey had been given an opportunity to appear as a hero didn't help his temper either.

Damn that fellow! Why couldn't he keep out of it?

"Good night," Jerry returned, and put out a hand. Alester appeared not to see it. She turned quickly, without another word, and ran through the dimly lighted hall to the darker stairs.

It rather dashed Alester, being left so.

Jerry flung open the door of her room with a suddenness that brought Myrtle out of a deep sleep. She sat up in alarm.

"Who is it?" she cried loudly.

The answer came in a broken voice.

"It's what's left of me."

Myrtle jumped out of bed and snapped on the light. Jerry stood in the middle of the room, removing her coat.

"What's happened to you?" Myrtle asked fearfully. Then: "Oh, my God, Jerry, where did you get that dress? Don't you know there's a special detective watching the laces this week?"

## CHAPTER XVI

JERRY'S knees nearly caved in under her as the meaning of Myrtle's words became clear.

"I didn't steal it, Myrtle," she whispered like a frightened child. "I just borrowed it."

"Yes," Myrtle agreed. "It looks like it. That's the way people treat borrowed things all right. For Pete's sake take it off before you stand there and shake to death."

Jerry did not move. Her eyes were wide and set. To Myrtle she looked as if she was petrified with fear.

"Here," she said and began to pull the dress from Jerry's chilled shoulders. It dropped and lay in a damp, soiled ring at Jerry's feet. "Step out of it," Myrtle ordered and Jerry mechanically obeyed. Then she forced Jerry to remove the rest of her soggy garments, rubbing her briskly afterward with a bath towel.

"Now get into bed," she said, thrusting Jerry's nightgown into her hands.

"You'd better tell me all about it," she said later when she crawled in beside Jerry, who lay with her face buried in her arms on the pillow.

Jerry told her, in snatches of words broken by gasps which suppressed sobs drove from her tortured throat. Myrtle remained silent until Jerry came to the pool incident. Then she threw an arm over Jerry and sought to comfort her.

"Maybe it isn't as bad as it looks," she said hopefully. "If they let you get away with the tunic I guess it means they didn't see you take it."

"But I can't return it now," Jerry moaned despairingly. "And if I don't I'm a thief."

Myrtle considered. "Can't you get the money to pay for it?" she asked.

Jerry shook her head against Myrtle's shoulder.

As they talked on into the night without reaching a solution of Jerry's problem, the conviction that she must return the dress and make a full confession or expose herself to the charge of theft, became more appallingly planted in her mind.

And there was the dreadful possibility that she wouldn't be allowed to tell the truth—that it was known already that she had taken the tunic.

By morning she was pale and hollow-eyed. Myrtle looked at her with worry in her eyes.

"Brace up, kiddo," she said encouragingly. "Mr. Barlow is big-hearted. I guess you'd better make a clean breast of it to him. Tell it the same as you did to me last night. Maybe they'll let you make it up out of your pay, or they might even wait and hold it out the next time they hand us the commissions."

Her words cheered Jerry a little. She gathered up the ruined tunic and inspected it with the faint hope that it could be cleaned and then returned. She had considered this possibility during the night.

That hope died instantly. A jagged rip was discovered in the delicate lace when she examined it. It must have caught on the edge of the pool when Dan pulled her out, Jerry thought.

She wrapped it up in some crumpled tissue paper from a shoe box and put it in her felt bag. She could

show Mr. Barlow how she had carried it away from the store.

The urge to make full confession and the desire to get it over with at once drove her to wait outside the door leading to the manager's private office long before nine o'clock.

"Who sent you up here?" his secretary asked when she saw her there.

"No one; it's . . . personal," Jerry replied timidly.

"You'd better go back to your department and ask permission to come up later," she was crisply advised. "Mr. Barlow may not come in before half-past nine."

"I'll wait a little longer," Jerry said.

Silently she prayed that she might see Mr. Barlow before she must be at her counter. Her courage was leaving her rapidly. If he did not come soon she feared she would flee in terror.

She kept her eyes fixed on the door to the outside office where she sat impatiently waiting. Each time it opened she felt as if she were being slowly smothered.

At three minutes of nine she rose to go. The door opened again. This time it was the manager.

"You'll be late," his secretary warned Jerry as he passed into the inner office.

"It doesn't matter," Jerry answered tensely. "Please tell him I want to see him about something very important. Right away please."

The secretary was touched by the appeal in her voice and manner.

"All right," she said. "But I doubt if he will see you now."

"He must, he must!" Jerry cried; "ask him."

The secretary gave her a closely scrutinizing look and followed Mr. Barlow into his private office.

"There's a girl out here who seems nearly distracted about something," she said gravely. "I think you'd better see her, Mr. Barlow. There's nothing on your appointment list that can't wait until nine-twenty."

Mr. Barlow lifted keen, understanding eyes to her face.

"Send her in, Miss Stahl," he said.

In less than a minute Jerry stood before him, twisting her fingers spasmodically about the old felt bag in her hands.

"What's your name?" Mr. Barlow inquired as he watched her from under bent, concentrated brows.

"Miss Ray—Jerry Ray," she answered swiftly.

"Sit down, Miss Ray." He motioned to a chair by his desk. Jerry took it, sitting bolt upright.

"Now, what do you want to see me about?" he went on, trying to make it easier for her with his kindly accents. He had seen women on the verge of panic before . . . especially shoplifters . . . he wanted to avoid a scene of that kind.

Jerry thrust the felt bag toward him, over his mahogany desk.

"It's in there," she said gaspingly; "a tunic. I took it. Oh, I didn't steal it, Mr. Barlow. I just wanted to wear it once—it wouldn't have been missed . . ."

Mr. Barlow leaned over the desk and took up the felt bag. Jerry caught her breath when he began to open it. He lifted out the tunic without a word and unfolded it.

"It . . . I . . . had an accident," Jerry said weakly. "It's ruined, I guess, but I'll pay for it if you'll let me."

Mr. Barlow turned his attention to her.

"This is a very serious matter, Miss Ray," he said quietly. "I hope you realize that."

"Yes, yes, I do," Jerry cried, "but I didn't dream that it would turn out like this. There's lots of used things brought back to the store. I was so very careful until . . . until they threw me . . . until I had the accident . . ."

Mr. Barlow reached out and put a soothing hand on her arm to quell her rising hysteria.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "Just tell me the truth. You'd better begin at the beginning, I think." He was familiar enough with human nature to know that a girl with Jerry Ray's fine record had not taken merchandise from the store without an urgent reason.

Jerry tried to tell something of her need. But it soon became apparent to her that Mr. Barlow did not consider her explanation satisfactory. There wasn't much excuse, she knew, for virtually stealing a dress merely for the express purpose of wearing it to a party.

She groped for new words to make him understand.

"You see I . . . I . . . I couldn't let my friend down . . . oh, Mr. Barlow, sometimes a girl just has to have a party dress! You don't know what it means to have everything in your life depending upon a dress and yet not have the money to pay for it . . ." she broke off scanning his face in a forlorn hope.

"But you spoke a while ago of paying for this tunic," Mr. Barlow reminded her. "How will you do that if you hadn't the money yesterday to pay for it?"

A great deal—far more than she guessed—depended upon Jerry's answer. Mr. Barlow knew that girls who attended parties at roadhouses often received expensive

favours, sometimes with hundred-dollar bills tucked into them. If one of his girls . . .

"I haven't any money," Jerry said helplessly, "but I can live on half my wages, somehow, until the tunic is paid for."

Mr. Barlow's face showed his relief.

"I'd like to let you do that, Miss Ray," he said pityingly, "but the discipline we must maintain here forbids it. In fact, I should not like it to become known throughout the establishment that we are letting you off so easily."

Jerry fastened her eyes upon him in mute suspense.

"We can't keep you with us," he went on. "You can see the bad effect it would have upon any employe who might be tempted to do as you did . . ."

He looked away from her.

"In a store that employs thousands of girls we can't be too careful . . . but I shall not insist that you reimburse us for our loss." He pressed a button.

"Miss Stahl will see that you get the money due you and at the proper time you will receive whatever you have earned in commissions."

Mr. Barlow did not look at her again.

Jerry rose and passed out the door.

Jerry Ray, jobless and penniless!

## CHAPTER XVII

JERRY could not blame Mr. Barlow. She had expected to lose her job, to have even a worse calamity befall her, but she had hoped against disaster. When the effect of the first shock had spent itself she told herself that there was no other alternative for the manager to follow. She had worked in Fane's long enough to know that the stories of such experiences as hers often leaked out—even from the highest office.

But to be out of a job and penniless! Less than a week's pay in her pocketbook—and her room rent due on Saturday . . .

It was a dreary prospect. But she ought—she said to Myrtle—to be glad she wasn't behind the bars. And, besides, she had some decent clothes to wear while she searched for a new place.

Clothes were an asset. She remembered the way prospective employers had appraised her cheap, unattractive dresses when she had first made the rounds looking for a job in New York. She had aspired to something higher than the laces—she wanted something in the dress department. But her appearance was against her, she realized later.

She managed to get into the laces, however, because she proved to the personnel director at Fane's that she was familiar with them. Hadn't her mother washed and

mended for many years the fine pieces belonging to Marblehead's limited aristocracy?

"Well, try and not look like you'd never be able to eat lollipops again," Myrtle advised her. "No one would give a job to a long mug like yours. And don't worry about the rent. I'll pay it this week."

"You're a brick, Myrtle," Jerry assured her. "I'll go out the first thing Monday morning to look for work. But what will I say was the reason I left Fane's?"

"You'd better tell all interested parties that you got the gate," Myrtle said seriously. "And refer them to Fane's for the reason. Mr. Barlow won't give you a black eye. It's in your favor that you laid your cards face up without being caught. But I'll bet that special dick gets a chance to park his 'dogs' on the carpet."

The last words came in a mumble. Myrtle was bent over, applying polish to her pumps. Jerry noticed a run in her stocking. She went over to the dresser and got out a pair from her drawer. They were the best she owned.

"Going to a dance with George, aren't you?" she asked.

Myrtle wagged her head.

"You'd better wear these stockings then," Jerry said and tossed the silken hose to her. The latter squealed with delight.

"You ought to come with us," she said a few minutes later. "Honest, George won't mind," she added, pulling a wide hat down on the side of her forehead.

"Thanks," Jerry returned; "I've got to press a dress and wash my hair."

Myrtle went without her. Sometimes she resented her roommate's aloofness with George and the boy friends she had begged him to introduce to Jerry. But she knew

how Jerry felt tonight—that she hadn't the least desire to go out. And judging from the snatches of information she had been able to obtain from her, things hadn't gone so well between Jerry and Alester, either.

Jerry was thinking of Alester while she waited patiently for the small flatiron to heat on the gas plate. He certainly had been frosty because she had refused to "do" another roadhouse with him last night.

Suppose he remained angry? Jerry grimaced. After she had lost her job trying to impress him. And Dan was through with her, too, because she hadn't tried to play up to him. It looked as if she had been completely annihilated.

The telephone rang while she was pressing the dress she would wear the next morning. The door was partly open to provide air circulation. It was a warm night. She could hear the landlady take down the receiver and utter a curt, "hello."

"Miss Ray," she could hear the landlady announce upstairs. Jerry replaced the iron on the gas plate and turned the flame low. Her first thought strangely was that Dan was calling. No, she was sure he wouldn't . . . but it might be Alester.

She hurried down the stairs, her haste induced by nervousness rather than a desire to talk to Alester. She felt she was in no mood to be pleasant to him if he indicated a desire to prolong his ill humor of the night before.

"Hello," she said stiffly, and then barely suppressed an exclamation of pleasure when she recognized the voice at the other end.

It was Dan.

"I'm just around the corner, in a cigar store," he told her. "My car is already parked in front of your place."

I'd think I was the luckiest man in New York if I found you in it when I get back there."

Jerry did not hesitate over her decision.

"I'll be down in 10 minutes," she said breathlessly.

She was true to her word, but in those 10 minutes she had found time to remind herself that Dan Harvey was a menace to her aspirations.

There was no denying it. Every time she saw him she thought she felt a little deeper in love with him . . . not enough yet to cause her to throw up all plans for the future she urgently desired but enough to rob that hoped-for future of much of its glowing glamor.

Was she, at last, on the brink of the chasm that had swallowed Doris and the rest of her friends? No, no, she must remember, no matter how much she might love Dan Harvey, that love did not last. What was that immortal wisecrack about the diamond bracelet? Well, that was true. It did last forever! But a kiss . . .

Dan wanted to know why she had not waited for him in the garden. This was her opportunity, Jerry saw, to let him know that Alester came first in her thoughts. Yet surely Dan must suspect that Alester hadn't as yet asked her to marry him—he wouldn't be here if he hadn't guessed that such was the case . . . perhaps Alester had told him. Jerry reflected uncomfortably.

Dan might know more about Alester's intentions toward her than she knew. The thought robbed her of all power to speak of Alester's priority rights to her affections.

"You were gone a long time," she said truthfully. "I was cold in my wet dress. Alester came along. He took me there so he thought he ought to bring me home," she added lamely.

"I couldn't find your wrap," Dan explained. "I hope you didn't get chilled driving home."

Jerry wondered why he bent such a queer look upon her. It never occurred to her that Dan was seeking information. He wanted to know how and when she returned home. Knowing Alester as he did he half suspected he would try to make a tour of the roadhouses if Jerry insisted upon leaving the Rolling Stone Inn. He thought she had insisted last night.

It had been a terrible shock to Dan to see Jerry there. Her presence revealed to him that Alester's interest in her was deeper than he had at first assumed it to be. His hope that Alester would forget her when she left Long Island was shattered then.

He, himself, had gone to Leontine's place because he knew Alester would be present and because he had promised Carstairs, senior, to keep an eye on his pleasure-loving son.

"Alester got my coat; it was upstairs in Leontine's room," Jerry answered his remark. "But I was a little cold coming home just the same."

The relief Dan felt upon hearing her words was not unmixed with a new apprehension.

What was she doing in Leontine's room? Leontine did not permit casual visitors up there.

"Good Lord," he thought. "This kid needs someone to look after her."

"Jerry," he said suddenly. "I've got something to say to you. I wish I didn't have to say it like this, in a car, but it means just as much to me here as any place else. Jerry, I want you to marry me. I want you to . . . more than I ever thought it could be possible to want anything like that."

Jerry turned her head to look at him. They were driv-

ing on Broadway and his eyes were fixed on the traffic ahead of him. Jerry could hardly believe that he had just proposed marriage to her. One hand was on the steering wheel, the other on the gear lever.

Could this be the same man who had held her in his arms last night and kissed her so fervidly—this man who did not even look at her when he asked her the most important question that can ever be put to a girl? Nothing but the tenseness of his voice was in keeping with the significance of that tender scene; it alone betrayed emotion.

"Oh, why did I come out with him?" Jerry asked herself.

He had already told her he loved her. She might have known that he would want to widen the scope of those words. Dan was that kind of man. Why had she thought she could ignore what happened last night? Now she must put an end to their—friendship. And that she was reluctant to do . . . she didn't want Dan Harvey to leave her, never to come back.

But if she said yes! How could she know . . . Doris said Harry had promised her a nice little home. Dan hadn't promised anything. And she felt she didn't love him so much she couldn't live without him. He ought to ask her if she . . .

The lights ahead were turning red. The car came to a dead stop. She would have to say something now.

## CHAPTER XVIII

"I've lost my job," Jerry found herself saying. It surprised her. She hadn't meant to say anything like that. It was no answer at all to an important proposal. Yes, it was, too. She meant that she was unstrung, in no frame of mind to settle a matter as momentous as her marriage.

The green light was on. Dan was seeking his answer in her half-averted eyes, hanging on her next words. Her first utterance had filled him with misgivings; it did not seem likely to preface an acceptance.

"Wait until we get out of this," he said quickly. "I'm sorry I was so abrupt, but I couldn't help it. I've been holding it back so long."

Jerry smiled. It would be three weeks tomorrow night since they'd first met. The thought gave her courage. Surely they couldn't be so deeply in love with each other in that short space of time as to make it heartbreaking to part.

They drove on in silence until they had reached a place on Riverside Drive where Dan could park the car. A magnificent view of the Hudson river was before them but neither gave it a thought.

Dan insisted that Jerry look at him. Holding her eyes with his own he asked her if she loved anyone else. That question Jerry could answer without hesitating.

"Please don't talk to me about love," she evaded. "It's only a pitfall."

Dan might have laughed at her response if he himself hadn't become such a hopeless victim of the tender passion. As it was he interpreted her answer to mean that she had never experienced love . . . mating love. If that were so, then she couldn't be in love with Alester unless . . .

"Why do you say that?" he asked sharply. "Have you ever come to grief through loving someone?"

Mentally he swore an oath that he'd choke the life out of Alester Carstairs if he'd made Jerry suffer.

"I've never been in love," Jerry said and now she dropped her eyes.

Dan reached out and seized her hands.

"I want to marry you, Jerry," he said. "I've never before felt like this about a girl. But when I gathered you up out of the debris of that wreck and held you while your breath came back and your eyelids fluttered open and after I had begun to believe we had killed you I got the first hunch that I'd met the only girl I'd ever want to spend the rest of my life with."

Jerry pulled her hands away.

"You wouldn't want a girl who didn't love you more than anything else in the world, would you?" she asked.

"No," Dan said. "But I thought . . . I had a wild idea that you felt as I did."

"But you shouldn't," Jerry cried in protest. "I never encouraged you."

"That's right," Dan agreed. "If I hadn't been a fool I wouldn't have imagined that you'd listen to me. But you know, Jerry, for a little while last Sunday I thought . . . see here, you say you aren't in love. Do you think there's anything better than that?"

Jerry remained silent for a moment.

"Yes," she said, "I do. I want a future that's secure. Marrying a poor man is too big a risk. I've seen the romance of a lot of marriages wash away in the dishpan."

Dan, too, sat silent a moment before answering. Finally:

"I see," he said heavily. "You want to marry money."

A swift rush of color mounted to Jerry's cheeks as she caught a hint of opprobrium in his voice.

What right had he to reproach her? Was his mother's soul starved for beauty? Did she carry pails of water to plants that were doomed by family selfishness?

Maybe, but if it were true Dan Harvey was both blind and selfish to be forgetting it. Of course there was the prospect that he came from a better home than she. In that case how could he know the bitterness of poverty, the ugly, dwarfing effect it had upon a person?

"Yes," she said proudly. "I want to marry money."

Dan looked at her with abject misery eating at his heart. He understood, of course, that she wanted to marry Alester Carstairs.

God, what an awakening she was in for!

"Jerry, Jerry," he pleaded. "You don't know what you are talking about. Why, girl, if you did that you'd miss all that we are born for."

He had a vain hope that she could be interested in love even if she had not experienced it. If he could but find words to save her pride, to prevent her disillusionment, make her give up this crazy idea before she learned that Alester Carstairs was not a marrying man . . .

It was hopeless. The more he discussed it the more he realized that Jerry's disbelief in the lasting qualities of love and her fear of its temptations was genuine.

He felt compelled to warn her even at the risk of in-

curing her anger. For the first time in his life he regretted his inability to exercise tact. He tried to laugh, to start it off carelessly.

"Well, I hope when you start your campaign for a rich husband you will look up the records of the eligibles before you take the dive," he said lightly, or as lightly as he could. He was placing himself in an enviable position, knocking the other man. He hated that.

Jerry said nothing. He would have to continue, make it clearer.

"Some of our richest young men don't have the things they're most famous for listed in the guides to society," he said awkwardly, hoping she would understand without the necessity of his calling Alester a blackguard in so many words.

Jerry stared at him blankly. She sensed something of the meaning behind his words. But the idea that Dan should be speaking ill of anyone hardly seemed believable.

"Why should people always think that rich young men are bad?" she asked, trying to keep the conversation in an impersonal vein. She suspected that it would turn to Alester Carstairs if Dan spoke his mind freely.

"That's not what I'm trying to say," Dan returned quietly. "Jerry, if you must know, I have one rich young man in particular in my mind. I'd hate to see a girl who wanted marriage fall in love with him, unless she were of his own station in life."

Jerry's color now became as vivid as a peony.

"Don't you think you ought to call me Miss Ray?" she said, wanting to hurt him because he had hurt her.

"No, I don't," Dan answered, "unless you insist upon it. A man can't think formally of a girl he loves as I love you, Jerry."

"Then you'd better take me home," she told him

quickly; "and . . . and I don't think we should see each other again."

Dan stared hard at the haughty profile she turned to him. How dared she look like that—the cold-blooded little fortune hunter! His own features took on a coldness to equal her own and he faced about to start the motor and move off with the first abandonment of care in driving that Jerry had ever seen him show.

The silence between them became oppressive. Dan broke it, not far from home.

"I know you despise me for knocking," he flared out unexpectedly; but you're such a blind idiot I've got to do it. Why can't you understand that an idle young whelp like . . . well, like Alester Carstairs, for instance, hasn't as much chance to escape common temptations as a fellow who is too busy to spend his time with pretty girls?"

Jerry smiled, a surface smile.

"Well," she said, "I don't know whether you consider me so very pretty but at any rate you appeared to have a lot of time to hang around camp, and you're here. You don't seem to be any busier than Alester."

"That isn't fair," Dan objected. "I'm busy, all right, but I'd chuck my job with Carstairs if it weren't for you."

"What have I to do with it?" Jerry snapped.

He was going a little bit too far when he thought he had to order his life to allow him to be her chaperon.

"I'm trying to save your neck," he told her grimly. "You've been wanting to go up in the ship with him, haven't you?" he added so abruptly that Jerry answered before she could stop herself.

"He's promised to take me," she said.

"That's why I'm sticking until he learns to fly," Dan explained. "The reckless young pup would take you up

right now if I'd let him, and he hasn't even got a license."

"And you haven't got a license either, to be saying things about him," Jerry cried in exasperation.

So that was why she hadn't been up in the silver plane! She had watched it winging its way overhead many times after it had been repaired and longed to fly in it.

Dan slid the car to a stop at her door. Jerry almost expected the tires to burst. Dan's shoulder touched hers as he opened the door on his side of the car. The contact ran like fire through Jerry's nerve.

An impulse, startling and primitive, seized upon her.

## CHAPTER XIX

JERRY was amazed at her own feelings. She wanted, rashly and without thought of consequence, to throw herself into Dan's arms and cling to him forever. In a moment they would say good-by at her door. She couldn't bear that, knowing he was never coming back again.

She closed her eyes while the swift surge of emotional abandonment coursed through her being. It couldn't be, her brain signaled to pounding heart and tingling nerves. She mustn't touch him. This was only a passing fear—something that she would get over soon.

She'd never been indifferent to partings of a final nature. People had sometimes thought her callous and cold because she preferred to avoid tender scenes. She didn't like to say good-by to anyone who was at all dear to her. . . . That was it, she liked Dan Harvey, liked him more than she wanted to, but it couldn't be love. It couldn't be love because he hadn't made her forget all the world for him.

Hadn't she heard a line about the world being well lost for love? Well, she didn't feel that way about Dan Harvey. She could see a background behind his proposal. Girls in love didn't see beyond the ecstasy of their lovers' kisses, she remembered.

Dan had kissed her, and she had thought of the danger his love was to her ambition.

She opened her eyes, the impulse to surrender van-

quished. Dan helped her out to the sidewalk and she ran on ahead of him up to the old stoop. He did not follow immediately.

She turned, with her hand on the doorknob. She hoped he couldn't see that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Good-by," she called, and turned to the knob. The door was locked. She had hoped this would be one of those times when it wasn't. She lost time in fumbling in her bag for the key.

Dan was beside her before she found it. He took it and let his fingers linger on hers. And he saw the tears in her eyes. But he thought them tears of anger or humiliation. She was a proud little beggar, he told himself. He must have gone pretty deep when he intimated that Alester Carstairs wouldn't stoop to her level for a wife.

Alester would call it stooping, he amended. To him Jerry was the highest-placed girl in the world. He had a mental feeling of looking upward whenever he thought of her, except when he remembered her avowed intention to marry money; then he felt like using a slipper on her.

"You can't wish me out of your life, Jerry," he said throatily. "You will save a lot of hard feeling if you don't try it."

"When I need you I'll let you know," Jerry flashed at him, but Dan refused to take it as sarcastically as she meant it.

"I'll consider that a promise," he said. "And if you keep it I'll expect to see you soon. Good night," he added, handing her the key.

He did not wait for another word from Jerry. In fact she uttered none but passed through the door he had unlocked and thrown open with a haste that bespoke immediate need of some place to cry her heart out.

When Myrtle came in she was washing her hair, having had to heat the water for her shampoo on the gas plate. That supplied by the heater in the basement had long since grown cold, or been used by the other tenants.

"Well, for Pete's sake, what have you been doing?" Myrtle exclaimed in astonishment. "Why didn't you wait until morning? Forget it's Sunday?"

Jerry was compelled to lie with her hair spread out on a bath towel laid over the pillow to let it dry while she tried to go to sleep. Myrtle had grumbled about having the light turned on.

Jerry wished she had a room of her own. Myrtle was all right to live with. She'd heard girls in the store talk about roommates who wore their things without permission, used their cosmetics lavishly and even read their mail. Myrtle did none of these things. But Jerry had been used to privacy; that much refinement at least she had had at home.

She didn't always feel like going to bed when Myrtle did and on very hot nights she thought with longing of a spacious bed with smooth sheets on which you could turn at will. And in the winter Myrtle had pulled the covers. Jerry often awoke chilled and tired.

Myrtle was a restless sleeper. She stayed out too much at night, danced too much, relaxed too little. Jerry told her she wondered she didn't dream of dragons and puppy dogs' tails from eating so often in Chinese restaurants.

It would be so much nicer to sleep alone than with someone who retired on a full meal of chop suey or chow mein and with a face on which makeup still adhered, she reflected.

But their room rent was \$12 a week. Twelve dollars a week! They could rent a swell house in Marblehead

for that much money. She couldn't think of paying \$12 a week all by herself. She could get a hall bedroom—there had been a vacancy on both the second and third floors since they moved into the house, but she couldn't move into another room and let Myrtle shift for herself.

It had been Myrtle who had come to her rescue when she first obtained a job at Fane's. Her rent then was taking far more of her meager funds than she could afford. Myrtle had suggested teaming up on a room and Jerry, in her inexperience, had been glad to accept. She had since learned about the hall rooms and their very, very limited space, but priceless privacy.

Myrtle grunted in her sleep. Jerry shuddered, but in the next instant she had reached out and touched her friend lightly on the cheek. She felt ashamed of her critical attitude. Myrtle was a real friend—they didn't always agree, but Myrtle had proved that she would stick in a pinch.

But it didn't seem fair that some people had to live in wretched, crowded discomfort while others . . . she thought of Leontine's boudoir. A place of silken paneled walls and gold brocade, of mauve velvet on the floor and exquisite lace at the windows.

"She took them," Jerry assured herself. "I don't know how, but I'm sure she wasn't born with a gold spoon in her mouth. Maybe she'd be living like I am if she'd been content to do it."

Myrtle moved in her sleep, flung an arm restlessly out across the pillow. Poor Myrtle. She thought this was a good enough room. She was content to be poor.

"Well, I'm not," Jerry thought impatiently. "I'll take what I want."

This thought was still in her mind when Alester tele-

phoned her the next day about six to say he was coming over. His voice sounded a bit gruff, as though he were out of patience with someone or something.

Jerry soon found out why when she was in the black roadster, headed for Long Island.

"I wasn't going to come near you again," Alester informed her. "I don't like your lack of sportmanship."

That made Jerry pretty angry. "What do you mean by that remark?" she demanded.

"I mean the way you ran out on me last night just because the crowd tried to have a little fun with you."

"Then you made a mistake in coming back," Jerry declared warmly; "because I know when I've had enough. Did you think I was going to stay out all night in a wet dress?"

"I could have fixed you up. I told you that."

"Thanks, but I think it was up to you to bring me home without complaining about it. And you might just as well know that I won't go to any more roadhouses with you. If you don't like it you can turn around right now and go back."

She was very sure of herself, very emphatic. She couldn't forget the warning Dan Harvey had given her. Perhaps Alester Carstairs wouldn't marry a shopgirl.

Well, one thing was certain—he wasn't going to ruin her reputation before she found out whether he wanted to marry her or not.

"Independent, aren't you?" he twitted her. "But don't try to take advantage of my giving in. I'll admit I didn't want to—but there's something about you, Jerry, that I find irresistible. Still I wouldn't bear down too hard on it if I were you. You know there are lots of pretty girls in the world."

Jerry laughed.

"Are there?" she mocked. "But they don't mean anything to you just this minute, do they?"

Alester jerked his head around.

"No," he said; "there's only you, Jerry Ray. And you know damn well I'm crazy about you."

## CHAPTER XX

JERRY'S heart gave a great leap. Alester had come back. He couldn't stay away.

Dan Harvey would probably be astonished to know that, Jerry thought triumphantly. It occasioned her no surprise that Dan should enter her mind at the moment. He had been there almost continuously since the night before.

And Alester was admitting that she infatuated him. Perhaps he would know now that he must ask her to marry him. She didn't suppose they'd have a regular engagement; she wouldn't blame Alester if he wanted to be married quietly to avoid publicity. But she would like to tell Dan Harvey . . .

She laughed at herself. Alester hadn't proposed to her yet. Her laugh was audible. Alester thought she laughed at him.

"Go ahead, make the most of it," he said. "Girls always do when they've got a chap wrapped around their little fingers."

"You don't seem to like it," Jerry replied. "I've always heard that it was a glorious feeling to . . . to love somebody."

"Oh, I like it well enough," Alester responded; "but I'd rather I'd fallen for a girl who had some idea what it was all about."

Jerry flushed.

"Perhaps I could care, if I'd let myself," she said defensively. "But I told you in the beginning that I don't believe in love."

"Well, I've an idea that you like other things—the same things most girls like," he remarked with satisfaction. "And I can give them to you. That ought to give me an advantage."

"It does," Jerry admitted, but she was not thinking in the same vein along which Alester's thoughts ran. She was being amazingly truthful, but he did not understand.

"I've a surprise in store for you," he told her a few minutes later. "You haven't had dinner, I hope."

Jerry said no. He had telephoned as she was preparing to leave the house for the delicatessen store around the corner to get something for a cold supper. Myrtle was out with George, looking over the site of the hot dog stand he and his friend were going to have built. Jerry had spent the day at home, "doing" her nails and her laundry after she returned from church.

For lunch she had consumed an apple and some graham crackers. It was necessary to save every penny now. She might be out of work for several weeks if she were unlucky.

"I'm starved," she said frankly. "But don't take me to a roadhouse."

"No," Alester said; "I won't. You'll like this place."

Jerry wondered where he could be taking her. It was unlikely that Alester would care for the average tearoom, she reflected. They drove through Roslyn and on toward Sea Cliff, and she was still in the dark as to their destination.

When at last they turned off the highway to take the familiar road that led to the old house near the shore

where she and Myrtle had camped she wondered even more. What could they be going there for? She knew of no restaurants in the immediate vicinity.

Alester drove up near the porch without enlightening her. Jerry saw that the swinging hammock and the wicker chairs were still there.

"Why, you haven't taken your things away!" she exclaimed in surprise.

Alester helped her out of the car by catching her in his arms when she stepped from the running board. He held her only a fraction of a moment and then released her. He did not wish to alarm her—Jerry had never tolerated any undue familiarity.

"No," he said; "I left them here so we could have this little party just by ourselves. You'll enjoy it, won't you?" He had not used precisely that tone to her before. It was filled with an appeal for her approval. Jerry was pleased.

"Marsh will serve our dinner," Alester hurried on in response to her affirmative smile and nod. "I couldn't think of any other place where we could be alone and . . . I want to talk to you, Jerry."

"I'll enjoy having dinner here immensely," Jerry assured him and ran up the steps to the porch.

Marsh was just coming out of the house, carrying a folded table. To Jerry he looked disturbed in spite of his almost expressionless features. He placed the table at the side of the porch commanding a view of the Sound and went back into the house.

Alester came up and followed Marsh inside. Jerry could hear their low-voiced conversation but could not distinguish the words. Alester seemed to be insisting upon something. Strange, with a servant, Jerry thought.

Again Marsh came out. This time he laid the table for two. Jerry saw him place a bunch of orchids at one plate, and he plainly took care that something within their folds should not be too deeply hidden. Jerry's curiosity was fired.

Could it be, *could* it be an engagement ring? What else could Alester want to talk about to her here, in this isolated spot? The setting was perfect for a proposal—even the most romantic girl could not ask for more.

"And I'm certainly not romantic," Jerry said to herself, while her heart pounded away for dear life.

Alester joined her, a tray in his hands. On it were two small glasses with yellow liquid.

"Cross your heart it isn't a cocktail," Jerry said when he held the tray before her.

"Of course it is, silly," Alester replied casually; "but we must toast the hour."

Jerry hesitated. She had said she'd never take an alcoholic drink again, but this was a special occasion.

"Don't you trust me?" Alester went on. Jerry thought he sounded reproachful. Surely one glass could not harm her. Not to take it would give him the impression that she didn't trust herself.

She reached out a hand halfway to the tray and then drew it back. It was Alester, she remembered, who had assured her that the silver fizz was as harmless as a soda.

"No," she said suddenly, "no, Alester, please. I don't want it." She expected him to try to force it upon her and was gathering her strength of will to resist him.

"All right," he surprised her by saying. "I won't urge you to do anything you don't want to, Jerry. Please remember that."

Jerry thought the remark portended something to

come. She began to feel even more excited. And just a trifle uneasy as Alester lifted the glasses one after the other and drained their contents.

Then he offered her his arm. Jerry rose and took it and he escorted her to the table with the dignity becoming a queen. When they were seated he noticed that her eyes were fastened upon the orchids.

"They're your flower," he said; "or, no offense, Jerry lovely, but they're the flowers that should be yours. All the beautiful things should be yours. I've seen pearls on necks so stringy the oysters that bore them must have turned over in their graves if they'd known about it. But I can hear any old pearl that's ever lucky enough to find a home with you broadcasting his good fortune back to his oyster bed to make his fellows envious."

Jerry didn't know why he qualified his statement about the flowers, unless he meant that they belonged to a classier girl. Well, she knew that, but she could be classy, too, if . . .

"But you've got to live up to orchids and pearls and charge accounts on Fifth Avenue," Alester went on, attacking the hors d'oeuvre on his plate with relish. Jerry didn't want to eat until she had examined the orchids. She picked them up. Alester raised his eyes from his plate and watched.

"That's something you're not to look at until after dinner," he said when a small leather box dropped out of the flowers onto the table. "It has to be lived up to also, but I think you would find that easy enough, Jerry, if you wanted to."

Then he had meant that she was too simple for rich adornment! Jerry put the orchids down quickly and turned her attention to the food. Marsh came with a clear soup before she had ceased to smart from his words.

Common sense had come to her aid and told her that Alester was right. She would need a lot of schooling before she could shine in his world.

During the rest of the meal she brightened perceptibly. After the salad Marsh approached the table and in a firm but respectful voice informed Alester that he must get back to Carmoor.

"The dessert is ready to serve, sir," he said as Alester waved him away.

"Had a time keeping him," he said to Jerry when the man had gone. "Mother often lets him off on Sunday and he's spoiled. Some maid in the house waiting for him, I suppose."

"You know, I don't think he approves of us," Jerry declared.

Alester lifted an eyebrow.

"One doesn't mind the opinion of a servant," he said and Jerry felt squelched. But she soon forgot his words, for after suggesting that they forego the dessert he reached across the table for the little leather box and opened it.

## CHAPTER XXI

JERRY leaned forward and stared with bated breath at the ring Alester had disclosed. She had never seen anything more beautiful. It was a square-cut emerald set in a band of carved jade—green jade. The clear, deep color of the stone seemed even richer and darker in contrast with the delicate opaqueness of the setting.

"To match your eyes," Alester said, holding it out to her on the palm of his hand. "Only your eyes are more beautiful, Jerry, with their golden lights that set my heart on fire."

Jerry's fingers trembled as she took the ring. She had been called yellow-eyed, green-eyed, cat-eyed, but never golden-eyed or emerald-eyed. She could not help thrilling to flattery so different from any she had ever received before.

"Let me put it on, with a wish," Alester said, coming round the table to her. Jerry lifted her left hand, a little ashamed that it had browned so during her vacation. Alester seemed to find it satisfactory for he raised it, palm upward, to his lips.

After a lingering caress he lowered it and picked up the ring that Jerry had laid on the table.

"If my wish comes true," he said, slipping it over her third finger, "you'll get a bracelet to match it; the jeweler is holding it until . . . until I know if you love me, Jerry!"

His words, begun softly, had risen in a swift crescendo until he reached dramatic utterance. He seemed to be carried away by his own emotion for he swept Jerry into his arms and crushed her to him while he covered her face with kisses.

She did not resist. She felt as if she belonged to him. A pang of dismay came to her with the realization that his embrace left her cold.

But she would not let her reaction influence her. Older, wiser, people had said that love comes after marriage. Such fleeting joy as she had known in Dan's arms was no more to be thought of as the foundation for a lasting marriage than a rainbow as a guide to a ship or a fleecy white cloud as a roof for your home.

Some such thoughts were Jerry's, but she did not put them into words, not even to herself. It was not necessary. All her adolescent thinking culminated at this moment in a severe discipline of her soul that did not require words.

Jerry had come to the point where nothing but a love so great that it would completely overwhelm her could eradicate the effects of the fallacies she had taken to herself as truths. Such a love she would not succumb to without a struggle. Dan Harvey's image was thrust resolutely out of her mind.

"Jerry, won't you kiss me, won't you say you love me?" Alester was pleading.

Jerry stirred in an effort to move and he relaxed his embrace.

"Jerry, we will be so happy," he went on when she did not speak. "You will have everything you want. I'll put you where you belong, in a charming little apartment with nothing to do all day but think of me. Jerry, don't hate me because I can't offer marriage to you. We'd be

wretched trying to stand out against my family . . . this way we can be happy without the whole world looking on, waiting for us to go on the rocks."

Rocks! The word came through the fog in Jerry's mind with an impact that was almost of physical force. Had he dashed her violently against a stone wall he could not have wounded her more. She felt bruised and battered.

Words came to her now, a veritable torrent of words, but even as she parted her lips to utter them Alester kissed her again. He was fighting for time, for time in which Jerry might recover from the shock he knew she had suffered.

When he lifted his face she was white and still with horror. Words seemed to her, suddenly, useless, futile things with which to attempt to flay as she wanted to flay this man who had so cruelly led her into a degrading position.

He had known she was not to be bought, this way—that she was not even a cheap little gold digger . . . there was no excuse for him.

With the strength born of a fury that followed close on her momentary helplessness, she flung herself out of Alester's arms and staggered back against the swinging hammock.

"Jerry," he cried.

She did not answer. Her face was buried in a cushion and Alester saw that she was convulsed with soundless sobs. He came over and put his hands on her shoulders but she instantly jerked upright and shook them off.

"I was a fool to trust you," she said, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Then she smiled in self-mockery. "A lot of girls have said that to fellows like you, I suppose," she added.

Alester dropped down on the hammock beside her and tried to take her hands.

"No," he said when she made an effort to get up. "You've got to listen to me, Jerry. You're seeing only your side of this thing and despising me unfairly. And, after all, you said something just this evening, on the way out here, that led me to believe. . . ."

"I didn't," Jerry denied. "I've never given you any right. . . ."

"You spoke of the advantage my wealth gives you," he interrupted. "I thought perhaps you understood its responsibilities also. Dear, don't you see that the obstacles to a marriage between us are insurmountable? And yet I can't live without you, Jerry. I'll devote my life to making you happy.

"Why make such a fuss about a simple little ceremony? What are the few words a minister might speak compared to the adoration and luxury I can give you?" He stopped, for breath, and Jerry snatched her hands away from him.

"Why do you talk to me like that?" she cried. "You know I won't listen to you. But since you've said so much let me tell you that a girl doesn't need to be a million years old to know what those few words you think so little of mean to her!"

Alester essayed a smile.

"What a charming little sophisticate you are," he taunted her. "But if you know so much about life surely you know what a hell of a mess some girls get themselves into just through those few words?"

"Yes," Jerry agreed. "I know. I've told you I know. That's why I'm not going to marry a poor man. Oh, you might as well know it," she hurried on, stung by his smile. "I'd marry you if you asked me . . ."

even now, and I'm sure I hate you. But it's a lot easier to be unhappy with money than without it, and no one's happy anyway . . ." she stopped, because her chin quivered alarmingly.

"You're adorable when you cry," Alester assured her. "So few girls are."

"Do you go around making them cry just to find that?" Jerry asked him caustically.

"No, just to kiss their tears away," he answered, and again Jerry found herself imprisoned in his arms. This time she resisted. And her resistance fired Alester to greater desire.

Real fear came to Jerry then. Alester became deaf to her pleas, abandoned himself utterly to primeval instincts. She sought desperately, frantically, to free herself. Breath was too precious to waste in calling for help—no one was within hearing distance even if she screamed at the top of her voice, she knew, but she would try it soon, as a last resort—before her strength failed her entirely.

She heard it before Alester did—coming from down near the beach and growing louder as it approached the house. It was a cheerful whistle, the tune a vagabond's devil-may-care air.

Jerry turned limp, a dead weight in Alester's arms. In the stillness that accompanied his surprise, he, too, heard the intruder's gay little tune. And he recognized the whistler.

He shook Jerry vigorously. She opened her eyes.

"Come out of it, Jerry," he pleaded.

She half raised her hand to brush away the hair that had fallen into them but it dropped back weakly upon the hammock. Alester left her and dashed into the house to see if Marsh had left anything in the cocktail shaker.

When he came back, the empty shaker in his hand,

Jerry was sitting erect. Alester glanced anxiously down the path to the beach. He could see someone coming up. Jerry's line of vision was obscured by the table. He wondered if she knew there was someone about—if she'd heard the whistle.

Quickly he picked up a glass of water and took it over to her. Jerry sipped it thankfully. Her throat was dry from gasping for breath.

"Fix your hair and powder your nose," Alester said to her with a falsely cheerful note. "We're going to have unexpected company."

## CHAPTER XXII

"WHY, hello!"

The words were spoken in pleasant surprise. Dan Harvey stood on the steps and greeted Alester and Jerry so. But his eyes flickered keenly about the scene before him.

Jerry sat quietly on the hammock, seeking enough self control to enable her to speak to him calmly. Alester covered her silence with a casual: "Oh, hello, Dan. What brings you here?"

Dan hesitated a second. Jerry saw his eyes linger on the table—the daylight saving time afforded sufficient light for this inspection though it was much after eight o'clock.

"Well," he said. "I happened to hear you tell Marsh to leave these things here. I was out in the cat-boat, amusing myself around the point, when I thought I saw a light over here. . . ."

"Nonsense," Alester broke in rudely, "we haven't had a light."

"Thought it might be a tramp," Dan went on evenly, taking no notice of the interruption. "Must have been the reflection of the sun on the windows."

Alester scowled at him.

"We've plenty of watchmen," he said shortly. "If necessary I'll send one over to guard the place."

Dan seemed not at all impressed with the curttness of his employer's words.

"There was another reason why I came," he said, and Jerry noted a change in his voice. "I telephoned Miss Ray's home to inquire if she had suffered any ill effects from her . . . immersion . . . and someone told me she had gone out.

"It occurred to me, this being the first Sunday since they left, that she and Miss Crane might have come back to get something they'd forgotten. People often leave things," he added, with full appreciation of the absurdity of his words.

He knew by Alester's scowling expression that he appreciated it, too. He hoped Jerry would understand also. She did. And the understanding brought the red of shame to her cheeks.

Dan was still chaperoning her! He didn't think she could take care of herself! She forgot, for a few seconds, how she had welcomed his whistle not more than five minutes ago. Then she remembered, and her eyes turned away from his.

She could read his thoughts clearly now. He had guessed that Alester wanted to bring her back here. And he had watched, out there in the Sound in his catboat. It was humiliating. She couldn't sit still under his eyes while he came to the inevitable conclusion that he had not watched in vain.

"You should have come in sooner," she cried, jumping to her feet. "Alester and I are just leaving."

"Sorry to disappoint you about the tramps, old man," Alester put in sarcastically. "Thrilling things, rescues; I take it you hoped to protect the young ladies as well as the chairs and tables." He laughed, but Dan maintained an even composure.

"At any rate I'm glad to know that Miss Ray is safe," he said, with a seriousness for which Alester could have choked him had it been possible. Jerry said nothing. She was jamming her hat down over her eyes in haste, fearful lest Dan leave before she could use his presence to compel Alester to take her home.

Take her home! Would he? Might he not insist upon driving to the Rolling Stone Inn or somewhere else? That was a chance she must take, for nothing short of abject fear of him could cause her to appeal to Dan for further protection. Once they were on the highway she would be safe enough. . . .

"I must hurry," she said nervously. "Alester, I want to be back early."

He glowered at her. But there was no choice for him except to do as she wished, with Dan looking on.

Jerry left without saying more than a bare "good night" to Dan, but halfway to the gate she turned suddenly and waved her hand at him. If he wanted to take it as a gesture of gratitude, let him. She'd have liked to thank him . . . only he had made her feel so cheap the night before, when he had hinted at just what had come to pass . . . she had jeered about wanting his help, too.

She couldn't show him now how she felt toward him. He might think he was a second string—to be remembered only when the other, Alester, had failed her. For surely he must know, when he learned that everything had come to an end between her and Alester, that she'd had proof of the character Dan had ascribed to him.

Dan waved back.

"Why don't you throw him a kiss?" Alester said sneeringly.

"I ought to kiss his shoes," Jerry snapped back.

"I'll get a pair and send them to you," Alester laughed.

"If you did they'd serve to remind me what a brute you are," she fired at him.

Alester's laugh broke off short.

"I don't suppose you'll ever forgive me," he said and Jerry was surprised by the unexpected humility in his voice.

"You can be sure of that," she replied emphatically.

Alester had been driving fast; now he slowed down to 12 miles an hour.

"I know all you feel like saying to me," he declared in tones of genuine self-reproach. "Let's consider them said, and I'll admit they're deserved. That leaves my defense; I've got to offer some, Jerry. A mere apology won't win forgiveness, I know. But you've got to remember that I took it for granted that a girl of your class doesn't expect to marry into mine. That's brutally frank, but I can't help it; it's what I've learned from the world."

"Your world, you mean," Jerry corrected acidly.

"Yes," Alester admitted; "my world, but that's my excuse—I was trained in a world of people who know that money can buy nearly everything. I made the mistake of thinking it would buy everything. You ought to be able to forgive me, Jerry, because you're so beautiful you would tempt even a man who knew better to lose his head over you."

"You needn't flatter me," Jerry told him coldly. "And I'm not blaming you entirely. I should have known that a . . . a . . . a waster like you would do something like this," she added, groping for a word that came to her finally as an echo from some motion picture title she had read.

"Don't be an idiot," Alester admonished her sharply.

"You weren't in any more danger with me than you would be with any other man who loved you as I do."

"As you do," Jerry repeated meaningfully. "That's just it, Alester. You've criticized me for not believing in love; well, I'd rather not believe in it at all than abuse the word as you have done. Anyway, I don't want to talk about it," she continued hurriedly as Alester started to speak. "I've got to think about tomorrow. You've caused me enough trouble already. I lost my job because. . . ." she broke off, sorry she had said so much.

But it was too late. Alester plied her with questions until he had the story of the tunic from her unwilling lips.

"You've got to let me do something for you," he exclaimed when she finished.

Jerry said no, very firmly.

"Do you enjoy making me feel like a cad?" Alester reproached her.

"You might ask yourself about that," Jerry retorted. "I can't help it if you feel natural."

"Just the same I'm going to do something about it," he returned. "Oh, not with money," he added quickly to forestall an expected protest. "But I have some influence in a field where you ought to be able to make a name for yourself if you have any talent at all."

Jerry looked at him inquiringly, skeptically. He saw that she did not trust him.

"There's no catch," he assured her. "I just happen to have a friend in the theatrical business, the producing end of it. Pulled him out of a hole last year and he hasn't forgotten it. So far I've not asked any favors for my help but I'm going to see him about a place for you in his chorus. He's putting on a new show this fall."

"But I don't know anything about the stage," Jerry exclaimed.

"You don't need to, for the chorus," Alester replied encouragingly. "You've got the appearance, and I know that you can dance. If you can sing too you'll get a real chance, but at any rate this will be a better living for you than you got from the lace counter."

Jerry was thrilled. She wouldn't let Alester see that she was and of course she couldn't think of letting him do anything for her—he would be certain to demand something in return, but the stage . . . no dull evenings in a drab furnished room, no early morning alarm clocks!

"You're not going to say no," Alester begged. "Give me a chance, Jerry, to win your forgiveness."

## CHAPTER XXIII

JERRY opened her eyes on Monday morning with a start when the alarm clock struck seven. She was about to throw back the top sheet and jump out of bed in a hurry when she remembered that this Monday morning was different from any other in her life.

A day of promise lay ahead of her. And it was not necessary to sacrifice half an hour of sleep for the sake of cleanliness. Let the other roomers use up the limited supply of hot water if they wanted to—she could wait until more was heated.

It wouldn't matter to her any longer that no hot bath was available on Sunday night after a day spent in moist and sticky pursuit of pleasure aboard crowded subway trains, ferries or excursion boats. She was going to leave all that behind forever.

Alester was coming for her some time in the afternoon to take her to see Jake Weinertz. Jake—famous for his choruses.

Jerry fell back on her pillow and stretched her arms above her head with a yawn of sheer creature comfort.

"You lucky little dingbat," Myrtle said to her, while she hastily pulled on a cotton kimono to rush to the bathroom, hoping to find it unoccupied. Jerry had confided to her the night before that she was going to have a chance to go on the stage.

"A girl can watch her step after she's had one lesson,"

Jerry had argued to herself while Alester filled her ears for an hour with his pleas for her forgiveness.

She had been convinced finally that he was sincerely contrite. And the prospect of employment that was pleasant, thrilling even, was irresistible. No more alarm clocks. No more wild dashes for a bath. No more hurried breakfasts of coffee in thick mugs and a cruller or some half-burned toast.

And the lure of the footlights! Jerry felt it strongly. People had always told her she should be on the stage, but never before she met Alester had she known anyone who had the slightest connection with it.

She thought of the dress she had planned to wear that day in search of work. It hung, nicely pressed, in the clothes closet. Nothing to do but manicure her nails and prepare to look her best. She pulled the sheet up to her neck and curled down for a late sleep. But sleep was impossible.

When Myrtle returned from her tepid plunge Jerry was sitting up in bed, her arms clasped around her drawn-up knees, day dreaming in bliss.

Alester was to telephone her when he made the appointment with Weinertz. Jerry had an occasional moment of misgiving when she thought of the assurance with which he had taken it for granted that he would have no trouble getting the appointment. Weinertz was a big man in the theatrical world, she knew.

But Alester's influence with him must have been all that he claimed, for at 11 o'clock Alester called her to say he would come for her at three.

Jerry flew up the stairs and danced a drag in the middle of the worn carpet on her floor. She would have her chance! Now it was up to her!

She ran over to the mirror to seek encouragement

there. And even in the slightly distorted vision that met her gaze she saw loveliness. Her eyes were filled with the spirit of adventure, of youth, of elation. They were fairly sparkling with her electric vitality.

"If only I'm not too scared to dance," she breathed prayerfully, satisfied that Weinertz would find her pretty enough.

Stage fright began to grow upon her then. She found it nerve wracking to wait until three o'clock, doing nothing. If she knew what to expect. . . .

"I hope they won't ask me to dance today," she said to herself with a touch of panic.

"What will I have to do?" were almost her first words she addressed to Alester when he arrived.

"Scared?" he laughed. "Why, Jerry, you have nothing to worry about. Jake's going to bless me the rest of his life for bringing him a girl like you."

Jerry felt a trifle reassured, but only a trifle.

"I don't know any dances except those Myrtle teaches me," she said weakly.

"They're enough," Alester replied. "Do the Varsity Drag if you have to show your stuff, and remember that I said you outstep any girl I've ever danced with."

That was praise indeed, for Jerry recalled the graceful dancing of Leontine and thrilled to think that Alester compared her favorably with such a woman as that.

She was a little calmer when they reached Weinertz's office in the Forties. The building they entered was far from impressive, and they walked up to the second floor, where Jerry was surprised to see the producer's name on all the hall doors.

She'd have thought, if he had so much business, that he would conduct it from more pretentious quarters. But perhaps the inside . . . Alester led her toward

a door with no other lettering besides the name of the producer on the glass. The other doors were sub-titled with the name of his assistants and their departments.

The lack of magnificence saved Jerry from being awestruck. She couldn't be impressed with poor surroundings. Alester opened the door to the waiting room outside Jake's private office. Jerry stepped over the threshold and paused in astonishment.

Along the walls ran benches, hard benches such as would not encourage prolonged recumbency. The floor was bare, and liberally covered near the benches with tobacco ash. People sat on the benches, people who beggared description as far as Jerry's vocabulary was concerned.

She felt as if she'd been suddenly transported into a new world. Wherever did such people keep themselves when they weren't here on the benches? Now and then a very queer looking human had come to her lace counter, but to find a large-sized crowd of them together . . .

There were a few girls with red, red lips and silken knees posed like the new pictures of prominent ship arrivals, sitting apart from the others in chairs. Plainly they were preferred applicants. Jerry learned later that word had gone out to the profession that Weinertz was casting character parts.

Only at such times did the "freaks," as she heard them called, throng the office. They could be seen there at all times in smaller groups, their bulbous or scrawny features set in lines of patient resignation to a long wait. Often they came day after day and sat the office hours through.

Jerry and Alester were shown at once into the private office. Jerry was prepared to find it as bare and uninviting as the other. But it was very different. She had

not known that offices ever were furnished so much like luxurious living rooms.

A man, a bald, round-faced man with a squat body, sat at a desk of some dark, gleaming wood. He was leaning back in his chair, his hands folded over an ample paunch, his eyes closed.

"Mr. Cairstairs," his secretary announced in the rear of his callers. The man sat up with a start and thrust out a hand to Alester. Then he saw Jerry and got to his feet. Alester introduced them.

"No experience, I understand," the producer said to her cordially. "Well, we're glad to see what you've got," he went on, not waiting for Jerry's reply. "Owe a lot to our friend, Alester, here. Where's your car, Al? We'll drive over to the theater and give this young lady a tryout."

He had touched a button while his talk ran on and when his secretary appeared to answer it he asked for his hat and cane. They were brought to him and Jerry almost allowed a smile to break forth when he walked over to a mirror to adjust the hat on his head. It took quite some few minutes. The cane was grasped with jaunty carelessness.

There was a stir in the outer office as they passed through and Jerry fancied she heard a few sighs. There was no doubt, however, about the muttered remark that came from a pair of red, red lips. Jerry expected to see Mr. Weinertz turn upon the girl but, apparently, he must have been slightly deaf; at any rate he appeared not to hear what had been said. Jerry made a mental note to speak in a raised voice when she addressed him,

A moment later, when she had occasion to do so, he said:

"My dear, I hear perfectly . . . what I wish to hear."

Jerry flushed.

They got into Alester's car and started off. Jerry thought the theater must be several blocks away, and when Alester drove to Broadway and down a block, then west again, she was both amused and surprised. They could have walked the distance in a few minutes.

But there was no time to wonder about Mr. Weinertz's idiosyncrasies. He had her by the arm leading her into his theater where, if she was fortunate, a golden future lay ahead of her.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE theater was dimly lighted—and silently vast, it seemed to Jerry, who never before had been in an empty auditorium. They walked down to the front row of seats and stopped. Jerry could hear voices coming across the bare stage from the region that had always been a fascinating world of mystery to her.

"Lights," Mr. Weinertz bawled, and there was a scurry of feet in answer. A few seconds later the stage was flooded with light and the producer turned to Jerry with a smile.

"Will you walk through that door over there and go up on the stage, please?" he said.

Jerry glanced at Alester, her heart in her slippers. He took her by the arm and moved with her to the door.

"Don't forget what I told you, kiddy," he whispered. "Close your eyes while you dance and pretend you're a prima donna stopping the show."

Jerry forced a smile. Alester accompanied her to the stage and stood by while a piano was moved onto it at Mr. Weinertz's order. Then he left her, after dragging a chair from the wings and placing it near him.

A young man came out and seated himself at the piano. He did not look at Jerry and she thought he must have left some interesting occupation to play for her tryout, he seemed so sullenly bored about something.

More lights were turned on and she feared that the trembling in her knees could be seen from the front seats, where Alester had joined Mr. Weinertz.

Suddenly a jazz tune jangled out from the piano and Jerry heard a voice calling to her to dance. She closed her eyes and attempted to obey. But her feet had become glued to the floor.

"All right, all right," Mr. Weinertz shouted to the piano player.

Then to Alester: "Go up and get your little friend, Al."

The music crashed to a stop. Jerry's heart turned to ice. She had failed, but they'd given her such a little time. . . . Alester was leading her off the stage in silence. She was too humiliated to look at him.

Mr. Weinertz was standing. He put out a hand and took one of hers.

"My my," he said; "what a cold hand it is. But that is fine, fine. All the true artists have stage fright. The others—pooh—no imagination. I would not want a girl even in my chorus who was like that." He pushed Jerry gently into a seat. "Now you will sit here and get used to the theater," he went on, "while we hear some singers."

Jerry felt a surge of relief come over her that brought tears to her eyes. She sank back in the sea with a big sigh. Alester began to talk rapidly, inconsequentially, and she knew that he, too, had been misled by Jake Weinertz's calling her off the stage; that he was evincing relief.

They had to wait a few minutes before the singers arrived. Mr. Weinertz turned to Jerry and told her with unaffected frankness that her figure was good, very good. She guessed that was why he was giving her a second trial. Apparently she had passed the first test.

"We're going to hear the singers," he went on, "who got by the auditions."

Jerry asked what an audition was. Ordinarily she would not have done that, but she wanted to say something, something about the theater, and she knew practically nothing concerning it.

"It's the test we give to voices," Mr. Weinertz explained. "Those singers Mr. Arradonde selects at his auditions come here and sing for me. They must be judged for appearance and stage presence, as well as for voice," he added conversationally.

Jerry was glad she hadn't been asked to sing, doubly so when, a little later, several young women came onto the stage and hovered nervously around the piano. The pianist was called and again took his place. One of the singers stepped forth at a signal from a small, dark man with gray hair at his temples whom Jerry had not seen step out of the wings, and took a place nearer the proscenium.

The pianist struck up a lyric air and the aspirant for stage honors opened her mouth to sing. Jerry thought she must surely be frightened to death, but her notes came true and pure. Mr. Weinertz nodded his head. Jerry could see that the dark-haired man was watching him expectantly. She held her breath for the girl on the stage.

"Too bad; too bad," he muttered sadly. "A lovely voice, but bandy legs . . ."

He gave some signal that Jerry did not see. Mr. Arradonde—she guessed it must be he—motioned the singer back to the piano when the music stopped abruptly in the middle of her song.

Then another girl walked down stage and Jerry felt Mr. Weinertz's arm brush against hers as he jerked him-

self forward in his seat, his eyes on the scene before him.

"Arradonde," he called, before the girl could start singing. "Come here."

The dark man came to the footlights and Jerry could hear plainly what passed between him and Mr. Weinertz when the latter went over to talk to him.

She looked curiously at the girl on the stage. Surely she was good looking enough and she was very smartly dressed.

"She can't sing—she's a piece of tinsel, I tell you," Mr. Weinertz was saying angrily to Mr. Arradonde.

The latter turned to look at the girl. His brows came together in a black line.

"I don't remember having seen her before," he said.

"No, of course you don't," Mr. Weinertz answered excitedly. "It's her old trick. She wants to get out of the chorus so she slipped into the office with your singers after you'd heard them and . . . here she is," he added, "but she tried the same thing last year with Mr. Shields. I remember her."

He raised his face to the girl.

"If you had a voice to match your nerve," he said to her, "I'd go into grand opera and sign you up for life. Get off the stage. Come around for regular rehearsal tomorrow if you want a place in the chorus."

"You go to hell," the girl retorted and shrugged her way off the stage.

Jerry's mouth was O-shaped in surprise. She pulled away from the producer when he came back to his seat. Was that the way he talked to girls who didn't have rich young friends to introduce them?

The theater had lost some of its glamour already.

Two of the remaining singers were rudely stopped and motioned away. Jerry's heart bled for them, and

for the poor creatures hopefully occupying the hard benches in Mr. Weinertz's waiting room.

She was glad when the tryouts for the singers were over. It didn't matter quite so much to her now whether she failed or succeeded. She had begun to perceive that one must have a love for the stage greater than hers not to mind its seamy side.

But she'd started and she'd make good if she could. There was a seamy side to working in a department store, too; the cranky customers, for instance.

When she found herself on the stage the second time she was able to dance—not as well as she could, but well enough to satisfy Mr. Weinertz that she possessed grace and a sense of rhythm.

He was willing, he told her, to engage her for the chorus, but he hoped she realized that a lot of hard work was attached to the job. Jerry said she would be glad to work hard. It couldn't be, she thought, with an inward smile, so very hard to practice dance steps. Why, dancing was fun. It was the fear of being rudely bawled out that bothered her.

She and Alester left the theater alone. Mr. Weinertz had other business there.

"Let's go to the Ambassador and dance," he said eagerly. "I'm proud of you, Jerry."

It was the first time Alester had taken Jerry to a fashionable hotel. Perhaps he was still making amends, she thought. Well, she wasn't ashamed of her appearance, and she was going to be somebody now. He might really be proud of her some day.

The tea room with its air of richness delighted her. She had to pinch herself once or twice to make sure that she wasn't dreaming and that she would not wake up

presently and find herself back in her furnished room, with a day at Fane's ahead of her.

The women she saw at nearby tables were beautifully gowned and all of them wore at least one jewel. Jerry glanced at her own hands. They looked so bare without even a single ring.

Perhaps Alester followed her glance and read her thoughts for he reached into his pockets and pulled out the emerald ring she had given back to him. He put it on the table between them and Jerry wondered what he was going to say.

## CHAPTER XXV

"You will need this now," Alester said, flicking the ring a little nearer to Jerry. "Jake's girls will consider you declassé if you haven't any jewelry."

Jerry did not pick it up.

"There aren't any strings tied to it," Alester went on, guessing at her thoughts.

"How about wishes?" Jerry asked, giving him a straight look. Alester leaned forward with a smile.

"Can you imagine what a mad world this would be if everyone could make his wishes come true?" he said.

"I know it would be no place for shop girls," Jerry replied, still eyeing him candidly.

"You mean for chorus girls," Alester corrected. "Forget your department store, Jerry, and"—his voice became very serious—"please forget yesterday. Let's declare a new deal. Take the ring; I choose it because it belongs to you, and I'll try to stop wishing anything you wouldn't like."

He picked up the ring himself and held it out to her. Jerry let him slip it over her finger, then she turned her head quickly to see if they had been observed. No one appeared to have noticed. Not that it mattered, she told herself; it wasn't an engagement ring . . . she wouldn't want to receive that in public . . . anyway she needn't feel guilty . . . she was a show girl now. People expected them to accept presents.

Alester seemed to have an uncanny perception.

"You're going to be a success, Jerry," he assured her, "and there will be more costly things than this ring for you . . . if you want them, but I hope you won't."

"I'm afraid I shouldn't take this," Jerry returned doubtfully. "I don't feel like a show girl yet."

"Wait until Jake's stage director gets through with you and you will," Alester grinned. "He punishes them hard, Jerry, and one thing I feel I must warn you about. Hule doesn't like having raw material rung in on him. You may hear him say something pretty hot about pull, but don't lose your temper. He will make you if you've any talent at all. You can afford to overlook his remarks for the sake of a career. And there isn't a better man in the business than Hule to get started with."

Jerry promised to remember that.

"People are taking notice of you already," Alester told her when they were on the floor, dancing. But Jerry wondered if the attention she was attracting was not mostly due to Alester's social prominence. Surely the public must know who he was, especially here. It was nice of him to bring her among his own kind, she thought, softening toward him more than she had as yet since the scene at the shore.

"Maybe they guess that I'm very happy," she said, smiling up at him mistily. But even as she spoke the words she knew that they were not entirely true. If only Dan Harvey would stay out of her mind . . . and her heart . . .

Alester was charming the rest of the afternoon. Jerry saw a new and delightful side to his character. He seemed anxious to please her. Her softness toward him grew, but shortly before they left the tea room a jarring

note struck discord into the pleasant tempo of her thoughts.

Two girls, exquisite elegants from his own world, came past the table where Jerry and Alester sat. He rose at their smile, bowed, and took his seat again, though Jerry was certain the girls had paused with the intention of speaking to him. His attitude had clearly been meant to indicate to them that he did not wish to introduce his companion, Jerry thought.

She tried to tell herself that he could not be blamed for that, but she felt that he shouldn't have brought her here if he considered the people he would meet too good to know her.

They danced again, but she was no longer under the spell of the place, the enchanting music, and the fact that she danced with one of the world's most eligible young men. He appeared far less fascinating than he had an hour ago.

If Alester noted the change in her feeling for him, at least he did not comment upon it. They parted at her door without a date for the future other than Alester's promise to be at the theater for her first rehearsal.

It was in his mind to give Jerry a little time to think things over. He didn't want her to suppose he was going to seek to monopolize her simply because he had got her a place in the theater. He sensed that she would be more grateful to him if he allowed her to find an expression for her gratitude in her own way. And there was the ring. She must not imagine that he wanted anything in return for that. No, Jerry would have to be handled with diplomacy, he perceived.

Jerry could not restrain a show of pride when she displayed the ring to Myrtle. The latter said it was too bad it wasn't set in platinum.

"But I like the jade," Jerry replied. "It matches my eyes."

Myrtle guffawed.

"That's some of Alester Carstairs's boloney," she jeered. "That bimbo's going to have you eating out of his hand yet."

"You should worry," Jerry retorted; "but wait until my show opens; there's no boloney about that."

"I wonder what it cost Alester to get you in?" Myrtle mused audibly.

"Nothing," Jerry said with a flush. "Mr. Weinertz was indebted to him."

"Then you don't owe him anything," Myrtle said pointedly. "And don't you let him forget it."

"I'll feel that I do if I don't make good," Jerry replied, with a hint of worry in her voice.

"Gee, you're lucky," Myrtle said, "to get a chance like that. What's it like, anyway, the theater in the day time?"

"I haven't been back stage," Jerry confided and went on to tell her roommate all that she had seen. "It was awful," she said, "the way Mr. Weinertz bawled that chorus girl out before everybody. I hope no one talks to me like that."

"Well, they will," Myrtle declared. "You don't want to be touchy, kid. Learn to hand it back. When are you going to rehearse?"

"Tomorrow morning at 10."

"Aren't you lucky! You can sleep until nine!"

But Jerry couldn't. Myrtle disturbed her when she got up and dressed. At eight she herself was up. At 20 minutes to 10 she was at the stage door of the theater.

"Miss Ray, of the chorus," she said to the doorman.

He smiled. "A greenhorn," he said to himself. Aloud:

"Go right in, Miss Ray. I'm sure they're waiting for you."

Jerry flashed him a look of alarm. Had she made a mistake in the time?

"Rehearsal begins at 10, doesn't it?" she asked excitedly.

The man relented. "You got plenty of time," he said; "go on in."

Jerry walked through the stage door into the magic world of backstage. There was an unpainted table, a chair of the kind that you find in general stores beside it, and a bulletin board on the wall of the place wherein she stood.

The floor was bare and not very clean. At one side Jerry looked into a row of painted backgrounds onto the stage.

The piano was there, and the pianist. He was playing. Jerry stood still and listened. His music flooded the darkened auditorium with rare sound. This was not jazz, or popular melody. Jerry was not acquainted with the music masters, but the compelling beauty of Rachmaninof's Prelude in C Sharp Minor stirred her deeply. She forgot that she had come to rehearse for the chorus and that she didn't know where to go.

The young man at the piano seemed to have forgotten the rehearsal, too. He played on until the first of the laggard chorus arrived and intruded upon him.

Jerry had moved slowly toward him, drawn by his music; the other girls did not see her in the wings.

"Listen, Jael," one of them shouted at the musician. "Don't play that second number so fast, this morning. Get me? I had a hard night, trying to get the sugar off my daddy." She laughed shrilly. The young man

nodded. Jerry did not know if it were in assent; she suspected he didn't want to talk to the girl.

The stage door was opening often now. She could see girls pouring in as if they had timed their arrival at 10 minutes to 10 precisely, not a minute before, and not a minute after.

Well, she'd better think about what she should do. Go to the office and inquire? The sensible thing would be to find the stage director, she decided, looking about her.

She saw no one but the young man at the piano and the noisy chorus girls. She wouldn't ask any of them. The young man . . . taking her courage in her teeth she approached him.

"Will you please tell me where I will find Mr. Hule?" she inquired politely.

The young man was playing jazz now, mechanically. He did not stop when he answered, after one glance at Jerry. "You're the Carstairs girl," he remarked, with a bitterness that Jerry could not understand at the time. Later she learned that Jael Thane had given up a promising career as a concert artist to follow a show girl into the realm of jazz only to lose her after a few months to a man who made a star of her.

He had never gone back to his concerts, or on from the place where she had left him—playing the piano for Jake Weinertz's rehearsals.

Jerry turned away from him, affronted.

"He'll be here in a few minutes," Jael called. "Better go on to the dressing room and tell the wardrobe mistress to fix you up."

Jerry was walking blindly in the direction she had seen the other girls take. She did not want to meet Mr. Hule just now. Another reference to the part Alester had

played in putting her here and she would lose her temper. Alester had warned her not to let that happen, she remembered.

The sound of the girls' voices led her to the right dressing room. A double door swung loosely before her. She rather timidly put out a hand and pushed her way inside.

Her heart was in her throat. These girls were hard-boiled eggs, she had heard. If they didn't like her they'd probably wisecrack her out of the show. She expected them to notice her entry, but none did.

She hesitated and looked about her for the wardrobe mistress. What she saw was a long table with stools at each side of it and a double row of upright mirrors dividing it down the center.

Some of the stools were occupied by girls who already had removed their street clothes and were in various stages of undress. That was all she saw then, for the door swung open behind her with considerable force and caught her on the arm. She cried out sharply.

"Oh, did I hurt you? I'm so sorry!" a lovely voice said quickly.

Jerry's eyes smarted with the tears of pain, but she was conscious of a sweet face turned to her with an anxious expression.

"Oh, I'm always hurting someone; I'm so awkward," the lovely voice went on, filled now with self-reproach.

Jerry smiled at her. The pain wasn't lasting.

"It's my fault," she said. "I was in the way."

"But I shouldn't be always banging doors," the other returned. "You're a new girl, aren't you?" she went on with a friendliness Jerry had not expected to meet here.

"Then come along and take a stool next to mine," she

said to Jerry's affirmative nod. "My name's Evelyn Starr. I've been in a Weinertz production for two seasons."

"I'm Jerry Ray," Jerry told her. "And I've never been in a show."

"Then I can make up for hurting you by looking after your debut," Evelyn exclaimed delightedly.

She had taken Jerry by the arm and was hurrying her along to a place at the far end of a table. Jerry saw now that the room contained several like the one she had noticed first. A few of the girls turned their heads over their shoulders and watched their progress.

"High hat's found someone good enough to hand out a little conversation to," one of them remarked sneeringly as they passed her.

Jerry felt Evelyn's fingers tighten on her arm and guessed that they were the objects of the girl's comment.

When they came to Evelyn's place she pulled a stool up beside her own and then started pushing the jars and bottles on the table farther down to clear a space for Jerry's hat and bag.

"I'll tell you what to get," she was saying when a girl in a very short, black satin dress rushed up and wanted to know what in the blankety blank blank she thought she was doing.

Evelyn looked at her coldly.

"I'm taking advantage of the rule you girls applied to me," she said calmly. "I wish to have Miss Ray sit here—that's the rule, you know. Friends may have places together even if someone else must change."

"Is that so?" the girl in black satin drawled. "Well, I won't move, see?"

She jerked a stool before the place that Evelyn had

cleared for Jerry and popped down on it with decisive finality. Jerry saw her feet twine about the legs of the stool as though they meant to stay there.

Evelyn said nothing more. She was tight-lipped with anger, but she controlled it admirably.

"Go call for help," the other girl sneered as she walked away.

Jerry realized soon that Evelyn had gone for the mistress of the wardrobe, for she returned with the latter in less than a minute.

"Don't make trouble, Lucile," the matron said to the rebellious girl on the stool. "Miss Starr is right. She can claim your place for a friend. Remember, you girls, yourselves, started the custom."

"Aw, go to . . ."

"None of your swearing now," the older woman warned her quietly. "Move!"

Jerry was shaken by the scene. But no one else seemed to mind it. Evelyn was perfectly calm.

"Hurry," she said, "and put on your suit. She pointed to a folded garment on the table and Jerry picked it up. Her first stage costume! Gingham panties and blouse.

"I'll have your size next time," the wardrobe mistress was saying; "but you'd better shake yourself, little one. Old Hule is . . ."

"Everybody on the stage! Everybody on the stage! Everybody on the stage!"

She was going to be late—at her first rehearsal!

Jerry turned faint.

## CHAPTER XXVI

EVELYN, noting Jerry's worried expression, spoke to her reassuringly.

"That's the assistant director," she said. "He always gives us a few minutes, but please hurry."

She herself was scrambling out of her street dress and Jerry hurriedly followed her example. The other girls were trooping out of the double door in a shoving mass. She saw the girl who had quarreled with Evelyn about a place at the table, in the rear, already in costume.

"How in the world did she change so quickly?" she asked Evelyn in astonishment.

"No underwear," Evelyn replied succinctly. "At times she comes in with only a wrap on. She's been nearly fired so often she doesn't dare be late. Lives just around the corner, too. Where do you live?" she added with friendly interest.

"In a rooming house a little farther up town," Jerry replied.

"I live with my mother and brother on 104th street," Evelyn volunteered. "They don't like my being on the stage, but I want the experience. I'm going to write a book about the theater some day."

"How interesting," Jerry murmured. She knew that Alester used that expression when he had no better comment to make; and she hadn't the slightest idea what to say to a person who was going to write a book.

Fortunately, she felt, there wasn't time to say more. The last call came just as she slipped the blouse over her head. Evelyn caught her by the hand and pulled her along to the door.

Jerry managed somehow to get the blouse adjusted before they reached the stage. She hoped Mr. Hule wouldn't be critical of her appearance. The man must be an ogre, the way everyone was warning her of his temper. Of course he was said to direct this temper against girls who came under his authority through influence rather than talent, but Jerry was glad, nevertheless, that Evelyn hadn't been made late on her account.

She wondered what she would have done if she'd had to fight her way alone—and obviously you had to stand up for your rights here.

Evelyn led her over to a group of girls who were standing near a tall, thin, stooped man in rolled-up sleeves, his collar open on a hairy chest.

"Is that Mr. Hule?" Jerry whispered.

"Oh, haven't you met him?" Evelyn turned to regard her curiously. "Who engaged you?" she added as Jerry shook her head negatively.

"Mr. Weinertz."

Evelyn's face became shadowed.

"Then you must be prepared for Mr. Hule to be disagreeable to you," she said quickly. "But don't let him see that you mind. Do just as he tells you. The girls he picks on get ahead of the others, if they can keep their tempers," she added, dropping her voice.

The stage director turned upon them. He had heard of Jerry—had been looking for her among the other girls.

"Well, you didn't have the nerve to be late the first

morning, did you?" he said with a sneer. "I see you've dressed in a hurry. Pull those shorts up so you won't look like a clown and get over there at the end of that line."

Jerry faced about, even her lips gone pale. Evelyn gave her hand a squeeze. The encouraging clasp helped Jerry to hold back the words of anger that were on the tip of her tongue.

She walked over to the place where a number of girls were forming in line and joined them without even a glance at her tormentor. But she did look quickly down at the seats beyond the footlights. All were empty as far back as she could see. She was thankful that Alester hadn't witnessed the scene that had just taken place. She hoped he'd stay away altogether on this occasion.

Mr. Hule snapped out a few words. The music struck up and the stage director came over to stand before the line.

"Watch me," he ordered, and began to execute a few simple dance steps. Jerry kept her eyes on his feet.

"Now altogether, begin," he shouted, and the girls attempted to imitate his dancing.

As Jerry said to Myrtle that night: "Then the fun began—only it wasn't fun."

It was work. Hard work. It had to be done over and over again, and then again, long after Jerry believed she couldn't lift a foot another time even to spite Mr. Hule.

She thought of the night she and Myrtle had stood at their window and watched across the back yard while girls at other windows practiced dance steps. Jerry knew they must belong to a show. She could see others behind them in the hall that was rented to theatrical producers who had no theater in which to train their choruses.

It had looked so easy. A hand on a bar, a kick, turn, kick, turn, kick. . . .

"Some easy snap," Myrtle had said. Jerry had thought so too. One of the girls had seen them watching, had waved to them without a break in the rhythm of her exercise.

Now Jerry knew something of what that seemingly delightful occupation was like in reality.

It was true that Mr. Hule was working the new girls hard. And Jerry bore the brunt of his ill temper. Just when she thought the grilling was over it began anew. She and the latest recruits were worked alone and with the others. She felt faint and dizzy long before the rehearsal was over.

What seemed to her hours ago Alester had come in and taken a seat in the front row. She was too tired now to worry about his opinion or to care what further humiliation Mr. Hule might heap upon her. She went on mechanically following the instructions he barked out.

Presently she saw Mr. Weinertz take a place beside Alester, and a few minutes later the producer called Mr. Hule down to the footlights to speak to him. Jerry heard her name mentioned. And again when, in a loud voice, the stage director answered.

"If Miss Ray leaves this stage now she can stay off for good or I'm through," he said savagely.

Mr. Weinertz turned away with a shrug and said something to Alester that Jerry could not hear.

Later Alester told her that he had tried to get her off to take her to lunch. Before Jerry at the moment was a tempting broiled lobster and she hadn't the energy to eat it. The hunger that had gnawed at her earlier in the day was gone.

And tomorrow was another rehearsal day.

"Don't we ever finish before three o'clock?" she asked wearily.

"Oh, yes," Alester assured her. "Hule's whipping you into shape. That's what he calls it," he added apologetically.

"I'd say he must have a queer idea of shape," Jerry returned, with a wry smile. "I feel as if I'd never look natural again."

"It won't be so bad after a few days," Alester encouraged her.

Jerry slumped a little lower in her chair. She'd have liked to stretch out her legs, but she didn't dare. Her slippers had been kicked off and she was afraid that she might touch Alester with her unshod toes.

"Did you hear the razzing I got when Mr. Hule turned you down?" she asked. "There's a girl in the show who hates me already. That was pie for her."

Alester frowned. "I'd advise you not to be familiar with the other girls, Jerry," he said earnestly. "Better take your time about making acquaintances until you know the ropes."

"Oh, but I'm sure I have one friend among them," Jerry assured him hastily. "Her name is Evelyn Starr."

Alester repeated the name. "I know her," he said; "that is, I know something about her, I mean. They say she's head over heels in love with Thane."

"Who's he?"

It was then that Jerry learned Jael Thane's history.

"Another love story," she remarked bitterly. "Poor Evelyn."

Alester looked at her with a gleam of avidity. He shook his head.

"Jerry," he said tensely, "when you fall in love it's going to burn you out. Your trying so hard to avoid

it shows that you know in your own heart it will get you some day."

Jerry dropped her eyes quickly away from his. Her fingers fussed nervously with her napkin.

"Not if I can help it," she said with low-pitched defiance.

"But if it does, Jerry . . . Jerry, you're not going to be a fanatic? A lovely girl like you!"

Jerry lifted her head. "Let's not cross bridges until we come to them," she said, trying to speak lightly. "Tell me, when does the show open? No one has mentioned it."

"In about three weeks," Alester answered impatiently. "In Atlantic City, I think." He wondered why Jerry laughed.

"Just nerves," she said. So she was going to Atlantic City after all! But she had already found her man of wealth . . . only he wouldn't marry her. Well, maybe now that she was on the stage she would have other opportunities. Strangely the prospect brought no glow of elation.

"Does it take only three weeks to rehearse a show?" she asked idly, thinking of the difficult struggle Mr. Hule had had with the chorus alone.

"No, a little longer. You're coming in late, you know. That's one reason why Hule concentrates on you for the present."

"He isn't going to get my goat," Jerry said inelegantly. "The joke will be on him if he makes me work so hard I'll be good enough for a part."

"Getting ambitious?" Alester teased her.

"Why not?" Jerry challenged. "You never know what you start when you put someone on a ladder. I might surprise you by climbing to the top."

She spoke jokingly, but Alester took her seriously. He looked at her with new interest. What if he had discovered a potential stage star? It gave him a pleasurable feeling to think that it might be so. The feeling changed, however, to disquietude when the inevitable second thought followed. Jerry would have other admirers then. He had hoped to put her under obligation to him by getting her on the stage.

Had he made a mistake? he wondered.

## CHAPTER XXVII

ALESTER's first doubt of the success of his plan to put Jerry under obligation to him grew into a disquieting conviction during the three weeks she was rehearsing. His own fear of having put her farther beyond his reach inspired the feeling that he had made a mistake. And as his conquest of her seemed to be reaching the status of a dream he became more enamored of her than ever.

The lightness in which he had held her in his mind vanished—she became even more desirable, a really important person in his life. But marriage!

He had always taken it for granted that Mrs. Alester Carstairs would be a girl from his own set, a smart, finishing school product, one who could do his social shining for him while he followed other pursuits more pleasurable to him.

Jerry—beautiful, alluring Jerry—she would be utterly lost among his crowd. He thought of her at the country club; thought of her old-fashioned ideas about conduct; wondered what would happen if some beau in his cups tried to kiss her.

A girl as attractive as Jerry couldn't hope to escape the attention of men who had been encouraged by bored young golf widows and neglected wives to make love to them, Alester told himself cynically. Jerry would expect the man she married to protect her.

Think of a girl like that trying to stand on equal terms with women who sought trouble as a thrill, who knew how, when and where to let men kiss them without creating an eternal triangle!

No, he didn't want to marry Jerry—it would be a nuisance.

Jerry was vaguely aware of a change in his attitude toward her. A subtle sense of his perplexity, a feeling that he toyed with a fascinating but objectionable idea, invaded her mind and left her with mixed emotions. She was amused at his conceit and assurance, and chagrined because they were justified.

But she didn't want to think; her work in the chorus was tiring her body so that her mental faculties could not be goaded to sharp perceptions and clean-cut conclusions. Thus it was not consciously that she drew Alester nearer and nearer to what he thought of as a "nice mess." She did not guess that it was her determination to make good that was firing his imagination, causing the change she felt in him.

She had no idea that Alester saw her as a romantic figure on the road to success, that he was thinking less and less of the obligation she owed him, more and more of winning her at any cost.

But though she did not know that he was waiving her gratitude, she did not bother about expressing any. She felt that they were even—that he had helped her in order to make amends for his unwarranted conduct at the shore. She worked like a slave to merit the chance he'd given her, to make good his boast that Mr. Weinertz would thank him for bringing her to the office. To Jerry, that was sufficient pay for Alester's kindness.

She did not work in vain. The day before they were

to entrain for Atlantic City Mr. Hule admitted to Mr. Weinertz that Miss Ray had the stuff. The producer grunted in reply, satisfied.

He'd been paying Jerry a salary with money supplied by Alester. This he hadn't told Mr. Hule, who knew, however, that the girl was being paid. Mr. Weinertz was just a little afraid of his stage director's sarcastic comments upon such situations. If Jerry had fallen down it would have made him look ridiculous, because the other girls weren't receiving any money.

He had tried once to tell Hule that it was a good policy for him to treat his friends right. "If the theater can't get along without patronage it can go to hell as far as I'm concerned," Hule had replied.

"Well, don't work the little girl too hard," Mr. Weinertz suggested when they finished discussing the details of getting the show to the Jersey resort.

He did not explain that Alester had complained to him that Jerry was too tired to get out at night. Alester had, in fact, requested that Jerry be excused from a rehearsal, but right there the producer put his foot down. He wouldn't interfere with Mr. Hule.

So Jerry had found that the butterfly side of the theater did not exist for her, or for any of the girls who took their work seriously. One of the greatest surprises she had met with backstage was the presence of such girls as Evelyn Starr and Margaret Spear, for instance. The latter, a tall, honey-haired girl, was starting her career at the bottom in opposition to the wishes of her uncle, a famous compose. She was too absorbed with her family and acquaintances to have time for friendships in the chorus, even when she found a kindred spirit like Evelyn.

It would not have been so easy to deceive Jerry in re-

gard to the salary paid her had she not limited her intimacy to Evelyn.

The other girls would have told her about the two weeks guaranteed pay had she been on chatty terms with them, no doubt, but to Jerry the stage was only a job. It was a better job than the one she'd had at Fane's, but she hadn't given up her early ambition.

A chorus girl, she told herself, couldn't have the home and luxuries she had planned for her mother. That is, she couldn't unless . . . she thought of some of the girls who came to rehearsal all but dead on their feet, with hollow eyes and diamond bracelets.

They probably wouldn't be with the show when it opened in New York, she heard it said. Mr. Hule would get rid of them soon.

"Why did he engage them?" she asked Evelyn.

"Well, you know dear," Evelyn said, "to use a homely simile, there are usually some bad eggs in the basket. And they can dance, those girls; they help to train the show until the strain of working and playing too hard gets to be too much for them."

"But it's not fair to use them to teach the others and then not give them a chance to open," Jerry proclaimed warmly.

Evelyn smiled at her.

"Mr. Hule gives them their chance," she said. "They try to hang on long enough to appear a few times in New York, and some of them do. He won't fire them before that time unless he has to, but their chief aim is only to have some connection with the stage, no matter how brief it may be. It is their trade mark. Then the reserve corps is tapped."

"I can't imagine anyone leading such a life," Jerry remarked.

Evelyn looked at her curiously. "You know," she

said, "you've never told me, Jerry, what your objective is. And I have an idea it is not to star in the theatrical world, though you work hard enough to make one believe that might be it."

Jerry was disturbed.

"Why do you think it isn't?" she evaded, remembering Myrtle's criticism.

"To be frank," Evelyn replied, "you don't seem to have the theater in your blood."

Jerry saw a way to change the subject.

"Please don't tell Alester that," she said. "He thinks I want to climb to the top." She had not intended to do more than evade Evelyn's question, but the latter read an answer in the introduction of Alester's name into the conversation. She called herself stupid for not having realized before that Jerry's ambition was to marry.

"But I had no idea she cared for him that way," she thought, "and Jerry's such a real person. I don't believe she would marry for money."

Aloud she reminded Jerry that she had promised to come up to her apartment on their last night before leaving for Atlantic City.

"You've told Mr. Carstairs I want him, too, haven't you?" she asked.

"Yes," Jerry said, "but I can't let you know if he's coming. It depends upon some plans of his mother's."

"Is there anyone else who could come with you if he can't?" Evelyn asked.

"No . . ." Jerry paused. There was someone she would like very much to ask if Alester failed her. There was Dan. She hadn't seen him since that Sunday night when Alester had taken her back to the place where they had first met.

There was still time to send a note to Carmoor. She was a fool to think of it, she told herself, but it was

nearly three weeks and she'd not heard a word from him.

She'd got so she scanned the newspapers for news of accidents to airplanes. Alester never mentioned Dan. For all she knew, he might have gone away.

When this thought came to Jerry she realized that hard work and excitement had made it easier to keep him out of her mind. She felt better about it. "I knew it was a false alarm," she said to herself, thinking of the thrill she experienced when Dan kissed her. "You don't fall in love when you've something else to think about."

But she'd like him to know that she was on the stage, that she wasn't a shop girl any longer.

She had continued to smart over his reference to the wide gulf that separated her place in life from Alester's. She thought her sudden desire to see him was inspired by a wish to have him know that Alester had considered her worthy of his interest.

She decided to write to him, but not to tell him what she wanted. She must wait to know if Alester could take her to Evelyn's before she asked anyone to substitute for him.

Dan was puzzled over her note. It was a request to telephone her rooming house at seven o'clock on Saturday night.

He remembered that she had promised to summon him when she needed his help, but he did not believe she was in need of it now. He had told Alester in plain words what he'd like to see happen to any man who harmed Jerry Ray. Alester knew then that Dan was in love with her.

Jerry waited expectantly for Dan's answer. Alester had telephoned to say he was no end sorry that he couldn't come.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

JERRY had dressed herself in her printed chiffon. She had no evening clothes and did not wish to buy any until she had saved enough money to get a winter coat for her mother. But Evelyn had said her party was to be informal and that it would break up early.

Jerry was as excited and happy as though she'd had on the latest Paris creation. Perhaps it added to her satisfaction to know that she owned a good looking new street dress to wear the next day, and that Alester had promised to drive her down to Atlantic City.

Life was certainly taking on new color all the time. If Dan would call her, come and tell her that he was glad she was getting on . . .

At seven o'clock sharp the telephone rang. Jerry flew down the stairs from her room to answer it. Halfway she paused.

"He might think I've been sitting there dying to hear from him," she said to herself.

When the landlady came up from the basement apartment to answer the ring she saw Jerry there.

"Why didn't you answer it if you expect a call?" she grumbled, taking the receiver off the hook.

Jerry put a finger to her lips.

"Sure, she's here, sitting right on top of the steps," the landlady said when Dan asked for Jerry. The latter gave her a furious look.

"It's a good thing for your dress that I wiped them steps today," the woman went on, speaking to Jerry, but heard by Dan. "You must be going some place, but you ain't in a hurry, are you?" she added as Jerry came slowly down the rest of the stairs. She had planned to be even slower, but there was no point in that now that Dan knew she had been waiting for his call.

Well, she would be frank, anyway. He wouldn't be flattered when he knew why she was going to ask him to Evelyn's party.

"I suppose you know that Alester is kept at home to-night," she said after greeting him.

Dan maintained a discreet silence in regard to that, merely murmuring an inaudible reply.

"He was going to take me up town to a little party a friend of mine is giving," Jerry explained. Then she hesitated a breath, hoping that Dan might offer to take his place. All she heard was a slight hum on the wire.

"I'm at liberty to invite someone in his place," she went on, not so confidently now.

"Yes?" Dan said unemotionally.

"Oh, don't be so mean," Jerry cried. "You know I want you to go. But not if you aren't interested."

Dan laughed. "How do I know whether I want to go or not?" he asked. "Who is giving the party, and where?"

"I don't think you know her," Jerry said, piqued because he hadn't accepted unconditionally. "Her name is Evelyn Starr. She's in . . . she works where I do," she explained, averse to telling him her big news over the telephone.

"Oh, a chorus girl," Dan said.

Jerry gasped. "Who told you?" she asked. "Alester?"

"Of course," Dan replied. "Did you think, Jerry, that I didn't know what you were doing? Remember, you told me when we drove up the river that you had lost your job. I'm sorry we parted—the way we did that night. It gave me no opportunity to talk to you about your hard luck. And the next day when I telephoned you were out."

"Well, have you got anything against chorus girls?" Jerry asked, to keep him from thinking about the place where she happened to be at that time. She didn't want to think about it, either, or to talk about it.

"Not a thing," Dan replied, "because I've never known any. But I certainly wouldn't take you to anything like that affair at the Rolling Stone Inn. If this is to be a whoopee party you can count me out."

"It's just a little gathering at Miss Starr's apartment," Jerry said quickly. "She's a lovely girl. And her mother's there, if that helps any."

"It helps a lot. I've heard of parties in bachelor girls' apartments. What time shall I come for you?"

"As soon as you can get here," Jerry told him. "We're starting early because none of us keep late hours."

"I'll be around in a few minutes," Dan said. "I'm calling from the drug store."

Jerry knew he meant the drug store in the neighborhood. She hung up the receiver with a happy smile on her lips. He might as well have come to her door!

And his presence in the immediate vicinity of her house would give them time for a talk alone. "We can walk through the park to Evelyn's place," she planned as she put on her hat and a light coat.

She was ready when she heard his ring. And she answered the door herself, her pretense of indifference thrown to the winds.

Dan's hand came out eagerly to meet the one she impulsively extended. His grip on her fingers warned her that she had welcomed him too warmly. She had no intention of giving him any false hope. But it was . . . well, pleasant, to have him back again, to be going for a walk with him.

Their eyes met and Jerry read the love message in Dan's as clearly as though it had been printed there. She experienced a sensation as of physical contact that had nothing to do with the touch of their hands. She couldn't put the feeling into words, but it was something that made Dan different from anyone else she'd ever known.

Was this what was meant by falling in love? This quick response to another's nearness, this feeling of a union beyond the limits of physical things?

It was like a drug to Jerry, a bitter sweet drug which she craved but feared to take. Why the very turn of his shoulder had power to stir her, she realized as they walked along. She stole a glance at his profile when he took his eyes off her to watch the traffic for a chance to cross Central Park West in safety.

How could she have forgotten that she tingled just to look at his thin brown face? And this insane desire to slide her hand into his?

Could she marry Alester while she felt like this about another man? No, no! She must stop this nonsense. It was the same old hokum the girls had talked about in Marblehead—the same silly blah that landed them in kitchen sinks and ironing boards.

You might walk under a glorious sapphire sky with a man once and cook for him forever afterward. It was always the drudgery that lasted; something seemed to wipe out the sapphire skies and moonlight nights. It

was only the courtship and getting married that was romantic, Jerry assured herself. Marriage was dull, deadly, colorless.

"I'm glad you like to walk," Dan was saying to her. They had crossed the street and were entering the park.

"Perhaps we should have taken the subway," Jerry said nervously, convinced that no one could be in danger of any romantic temptation there.

"We can hail a cab when you get tired," Dan said, "but you look as fit as a mountain climber, Jerry. The stage seems to agree with you."

"I thought I'd drop dead on my feet the first week," Jerry told him; "but I'm used to it now."

"Do you like it?" Dan asked quietly. Jerry sensed a double question behind the words. Perhaps he would offer her marriage again.

"Yes, I do," she said slowly, and then: "It got me out of the shop-girl class," she added, to remind him of what had passed between them the last time they were together.

Dan understood her. So she still believed she had a chance to marry Alester Carstairs. The evening suddenly turned from one filled with joy to one steeped in wretchedness.

"We'd better ride, I think," he said shortly as a cab hove into sight around a curve.

Without waiting for an answer from Jerry he hailed it. She did not protest. The walk had been a mistake.

In a short while they were at Evelyn's. Others were there before them, Jael Thane among them. Evelyn had told her she was inviting him. Perhaps Jerry would have hesitated to be present at a party where Jael was an invited guest had she been less excited about the Atlantic City opening, for she had not forgotten the slur he'd

cast in her direction at the first rehearsal. And she might have wondered that he had not influenced Evelyn against her.

Jael saw her come in and his brows drew together in a scowl. He wasn't in love with Evelyn, but he knew her for what she was—the daughter of a fine old family—and here in her home was a girl like . . . like the little cheat who'd left him banging out jazz for rehearsals!

Although unknown to Jerry and Evelyn, because of their aloofness, gossip had been associating the former's name with Alester's. It wouldn't have occurred to Jael to mention this to Evelyn at the theater. She knew what to expect there. He was aware that people of all types and kinds interested her, but he was aware of the exclusiveness she practiced in her home. Jerry had put it over on her, he told himself grimly.

Jerry caught his eyes across the room and nodded in brief politeness. He merely glared at her. She turned anxiously to Evelyn, who was introducing Dan to some nearby people. Jerry hoped they had not observed Jael's rudeness.

Then she saw Jael coming toward her, his face unsmiling and set. He was thoroughly capable of making a scene, Jerry knew. She was tempted to flee, but her innate fighting quality held her rooted there, waiting for him.

## CHAPTER XXIX

JAEL did not come up to Jerry as she expected. Instead he stood off a few feet from the guests to whom Evelyn was presenting Dan and waited quietly until she turned to him with Dan beside her.

Dan put out his hand when Jael's name was given him, but Jael did not take it. Evelyn looked at Jael, startled by his strange attitude. Dan appeared bewildered for a moment, then he dropped his arm to his side, bowed to Evelyn and went to join Jerry.

Jael's voice cut the embarrassing silence in low, clear tones.

"Just a moment," he said, and such was Dan's surprise that he instantly wheeled back to face him.

"I believe you have made a mistake," Jael went on, without raising his voice.

"Jael!" Evelyn had a hand on his arm, her eyes entreating him to silence.

Dan waited.

"If you do not understand me we will step into the hall and I'll make myself clear," Jael said to him.

The few people near them were listening now in amazement. Jerry stole close to Dan, trembling with apprehension. He felt her hand touch his own, and glanced down into her troubled face. He guessed then that she was involved in this unexpected situation.

He faced Jael again. "If you will," he said with ominous calm in his voice. Jael bowed.

Evelyn placed herself between them as they moved away and thrust out her hands in a swift gesture.

"Jael, what is it?" she cried in distress.

"Get Miss Ray's hat," he said shortly. "She's leaving."

Dan's eyes snapped as he turned upon him. "If she wishes," he said, as a conclusion to Jael's remark.

Jerry came up to him, white and shaken.

"Please," she said, "don't go out with him, Dan. I don't want to stay. I shouldn't have come. I know he doesn't like me."

"Is he the host?" Dan said to Evelyn.

Jael answered for her. "No," he said, "but I will not permit her to be imposed upon by . . ."

Dan's hand shot forth and seized him by the shoulder.

"Perhaps you'd better not say it," he said with suppressed fury. "We don't need an enemy of Miss Ray's to characterize her for us."

Jael tore himself loose from Dan's hold. "But Miss Starr needs to have her characterized," he retorted hotly. "If she knew how Miss Ray got into the show business she wouldn't have asked her here."

"Oh, Jael, please . . ." Evelyn began tearfully.

Jael did not reply to her. Dan had seized him by the arm and was propelling him out of the room into the foyer. He was almost beside himself with rage—a rage that was partly inspired by the knowledge that he couldn't beat the man to a pulp.

The feel of Jael's thin arm under his strong fingers sickened him. Why, the fellow was little more than a skeleton! And the whiteness of his face did not reflect fear, Dan knew, because his eyes blazed with courage.

He did not try to resist as Dan shoved him through the doorway. Out in the foyer Dan released him.

"Now, you dirty rat, say what you have to say, and say it quick, because in two minutes you're going back in there and apologize to Miss Ray or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

Jael did not cringe.

"You may do that," he acknowledged, "and I might even apologize—though I shall not—and still it wouldn't make Miss Ray anything else than what she is."

Dan sprang at him. Jael stood unflinching before the attack. His fearlessness itself defeated Dan's purpose. He could not strike a man who was a physical weakling. His hand dropped helplessly.

"The advantage is yours," he said in disgust, "you rotten little bum."

The words infuriated Jael.

"Come on, fight," he invited, squaring himself for an exchange of blows.

"Don't be a fool," Dan said shortly, "I'd kill you, and I don't want the blood of such an animal as you on my hands. A pretty cur you are. You ought to wear crutches if you want to sling mud, because someone's going to biff you some day before finding out what a poor imitation of a man you are."

"And I suppose you think your size gives you the right to ring in a little rounder on a decent girl," Jael fired back instantly.

Instantly Dan forgot everything . . . the inequality of their strength . . . that he was a guest in someone else's home . . . forget everything except that this man had dragged Jerry's name in the mud. He might have hurt him badly had not Evelyn and some

of her guests who had been crowding in the doorway rushed out and separated them.

Jerry was among them. She caught Dan by the arm when Jael was pulled free of him, and tugged at it until he looked at her. Tears were streaming down her cheeks and she was as white as a sheet. Dan jerked one arm loose from his captors and put it around her shoulders. She swayed against him and rested there.

"Ask Miss Starr for our things," Dan said to a man at his elbow.

In a few seconds Evelyn, who had been seeing to it that Jael was led into the kitchen, came to Jerry and Dan and tried to apologize for Jael's behavior.

"Please let me take Jerry into my room and quiet her," she said to Dan.

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "I must take her home."

Evelyn appealed to Jerry.

"I can't let you go until Jael has made an apology," she said.

Jerry clung closer to Dan.

"Mother is overcome," Evelyn went on pleadingly. "She will never forgive me for letting you go before we get this horrible affair straightened out. Jael is laboring under some mad delusion. You know, Jerry, he isn't like other people. He will tell me why he acted as he did. I want you here when he does."

Jerry lifted her tear-stained face.

"I know what he means," she said miserably. "He said something to me the first day I went to rehearsal."

Evelyn looked beseechingly at Dan.

"I can't imagine what it is," she said, "but I know Jael will explain. He wouldn't speak ill of anyone un-

less he felt he was right. It's only fair to Jerry to hear what he has to say."

Dan looked down at Jerry.

"Miss Starr is right," he said. "You ought to get this cleared up, Jerry. There will be a lot of talk if it isn't."

Jerry choked back a sob.

"I'd rather tell you myself," she said, drawing away from Dan. He let her go and Evelyn put an arm around her.

Jerry could not bring herself to look at him.

"Everyone knows that Alester got Mr. Weinertz to give me a place in the chorus," she said miserably.

Evelyn patted her shoulder encouragingly. Dan was very quiet. A few of the guests stood by, frankly listening.

"And he thinks . . . he called me the Carstairs girl," Jerry said, beginning reluctantly and ending with her head up and her eyes wide with defiance.

There was a moment of silence as the meaning of her words penetrated the understanding of her hearers.

"Oh!" Evelyn gasped.

Dan's lips tightened.

"Oh," Evelyn repeated. "I think I understand. Poor Jael. He . . . I'm sorry to betray his intimate story, but you see it explains why he—why he thought what he did about Jerry. There was a girl—a girl he loved dearly."

Jerry alone heard the soft catch in her voice. "She bought her way," Evelyn stumbled on, "to the top . . . with Jael's heart."

It was now Jerry who consoled. She put her arms around Evelyn and they stood there silent until Dan

turned away with one of the guests who suggested that they retire into the living room.

Jerry went with Evelyn to her mother's room. Mrs. Starr was trying to regain her composure under the ministrations of the maid.

Jerry had met Evelyn's mother once before when she came to dinner. She had been delighted to be with people among whom she did not need to be on guard against a careless word, a too-inviting glance. Dining with Alester, as she had told herself frequently, was like trying to eat with a tamed tiger . . . you had to watch him all the time.

Mrs. Starr put out a feeble, welcoming hand. She hadn't had a chance to greet Jerry before Jael started the trouble. Jerry rushed over and knelt beside her. "I'm so sorry, Mrs. Starr," she said.

"I'm sure you are, my dear," the older woman answered kindly, "but it is we who must apologize. Jael is a queer boy, but I don't know what possessed him to commit such a frightful act."

"We know," Evelyn said soothingly. "It's that obsession of his. You see," she smiled, "Jerry has a rich young man whose influence put her where she is and Jael jumped to his usual bitter conclusion."

The smile vanished and Evelyn bit her underlip to still its trembling.

"You must make him apologize," her mother said weakly, and turned her eyes away from Evelyn's face. She was unable, as always, to look upon the revealed proof of her daughter's hopeless love for Jael Thane.

"Stay here, Jerry," Evelyn said, "until I talk to Jael. I'm sure everything will be all right when I tell him that I know all about you and Alester."

Evelyn left the room and Jerry was alone with her mother.

"Poor Evelyn," the mother murmured softly. "I wish she had never met Jael. He's a great burden to her and she loves him so much she feels impelled to humanize him."

Jerry was embarrassed by this confidence. She felt certain that Mrs. Starr offered it only in response to an uncontrolled nervous emotion. She scarcely knew what to say, but she was spared the necessity of answering.

Evelyn burst into the room to announce, in obvious excitement, that Alester had come.

## CHAPTER XXX

JERRY leaped from her chair beside Mrs. Starr's bed and stood poised in an uncertain attitude. Of course, she thought, Alester had assumed that she would come here without him. No, he had discovered that she'd asked Dan! Now there would be another scene possibly. She shrank from the thought of it.

"Where is he?" she asked Evelyn.

"I told him to join the other guests and I'd let you know that he was here," Evelyn replied. "I suppose he's in the living room. It wasn't very polite of me to leave him like that but I'm upset and . . ."

"Was he . . . excited?" Jerry inquired, moving toward the door.

"I didn't notice . . . yes, I think he was. Remember, I've only met him a few times. I can't say if it was my imagination or not but I rather think he looked different tonight."

"I believe I'd better get my things and go," Jerry said uneasily. "Good night, Mrs. Starr. I hope you will be feeling all right tomorrow."

She smiled back from the open door and then hurried out into the long narrow hall that led to the reception foyer. She could see Alester standing there before she reached it. He saw her, too, and came forward to meet her.

"Is Dan Harvey here?" he asked pointblank.

Jerry gasped.

"What's the matter?" she countered in alarm.

"I went to his room and found your note on his drawer," Alester replied angrily.

"You read it?" Jerry could not restrain herself from saying in surprise.

"Certainly," Alester admitted readily, "when I recognized your handwriting. It was laying face upward. Will you tell me what you wanted with him at seven o'clock?"

"There's no reason why I shouldn't," Jerry reminded him, "except that I don't like the way you ask me to."

"Well, you needn't bother," Alester retorted. "You wanted to hear from him after I telephoned you."

"That's right," Jerry agreed. "Evelyn had asked me to bring someone else if you couldn't come. There's nothing for you to get mad about over that, is there?"

"I won't have Dan Harvey taking you out," Alester declared warmly. "You could have come up here alone. And one thing is certain. I'm going to take you home."

Jerry lost her temper then. "No, you're not," she said. "I didn't let him take me home from Leontine's party, and anyway I'd like to know how you could come here when you told me your mother wanted you at home tonight," she added accusingly.

It rather surprised her that Alester appeared embarrassed by her question.

"She . . . er, changed her plans," he said evasively.

"Well, you needn't wait for me," Jerry returned emphatically. "I'm going home with Dan."

"If you do," Alester said threateningly, "I'll see that you don't go to Atlantic City with Weinertz's show."

Jerry stared at him in astonishment. She hadn't

dreamed that he cared so much about anything she might do. But to threaten her. . . .

"You can't have me fired," she defied him. "Mr. Hule wouldn't stand for it. I've made good with him and that's all he asks. Mr. Weinertz doesn't dare to go over his head."

Alester smiled at her.

"Pretty clever, Jerry," he said admiringly. Her unexpected opposition to him had cooled his temper a trifle. It also served to remind him that Jerry was a stubborn little creature who couldn't be driven.

Just then Dan appeared down the hall, at the kitchen door. He saw Jerry and Alester and came toward them.

"Hello," he said, "I thought you were at . . ." there he paused . . . "home," he added, and the anxious expression on Alester's face gave way to one of relief.

"I've come to take Miss Ray home," he said curtly.

Dan turned to Jerry. She looked at Alester.

"I'm going home with Dan," she said determinedly.

"Very well," Alester answered coldly. "Then I will not see you tomorrow. Please say good night to Miss Starr for me," he added, after turning on his heels, and was gone.

Jerry watched him go with a sinking heart. Surely he would not come back this time. And he'd been acting differently lately; she'd thought at times that his infatuation was ripening into real love . . . real love!

She smiled bitterly. It wasn't the men who trapped themselves that way. It was the women.

"I've been talking with Mr. Thane," Dan said, breaking into her thoughts. "Miss Starr seems to have convinced him that you're not the sort of girl he hates so. If you like he will apologize to you, but I think we'd

better dispense with that Jerry, and be getting along. Someone told me that you're driving with Alester to Atlantic City tomorrow and I suppose you will want to make an early start."

"Why," Jerry said, "you heard what he said. He isn't going to take me."

"Yes, I heard it," Dan replied, "but I know that Alester often says things in a temper that he does not mean. I'd advise you to prepare for the trip just the same."

"I'll not," Jerry delighted him by saying. "No one can dictate to me."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Dan assured her, "because I don't want Alester to take you to Leontine Lebaudy's again, and he is the type to try to dictate his own wishes in the matter."

Jerry wondered why he brought up Leontine's name. But Dan could not say any more. He hoped she would guess that Alester's mother had not figured in his plans for the evening as he had said and that it was Leontine who had enticed him into an engagement.

Dan was puzzled to know why Alester had not kept his appointment with Leontine and why he had come to Miss Starr's home, until he remembered that he had left Jerry's note on his dresser.

Alester often came into his room at Carmoor. Until they met Jerry they had been on fairly good terms. Dan knew too much of Alester's past to feel any warm friendship for him, but he was too sensible to set himself up as monitor of a man with whom his business brought him in contact.

The realization that Alester was jealous of Jerry added nothing to Dan's happiness. He hadn't believed that Alester would spend much time with a nice girl of the

"lower middle class," but now he wondered if he might not have misjudged him in another way.

Suppose he should want to marry Jerry! The idea of Jerry embracing marriage with a philanderer such as Alester made him shudder; not merely because he loved her himself but because he knew how a man like Alester could make a proud woman suffer.

"I've told him I won't go there any more," Jerry said in answer to his reference to Leontine's inn. "These people who think that every girl of today is crazy for gin and jazz make me tired," she added irrelevantly.

At least it seemed irrelevant to Dan, but Jerry had suddenly thought of a letter she'd had from home that day. Her mother had told her neighbors about Jerry's going on the stage and their comments had been a sermon on the evils of theatrical life.

Dan's reference to the Lebaudy place had reminded her that Alester, too, had imputed a taste for wild life to the modern-girl, even to one who was not of the stage. He was continually trying to break down her opposition to night clubs and roadhouses. He seemed to think it was a pose.

"He's been playing around with the live ones so long he thinks everybody else ought to be buried," Dan said crisply. "But let's not stand here talking, if you're ready to leave."

Jerry went into Evelyn's room and got her hat and wrap.

"I've already said good night," she told Dan when she rejoined him. He found his hat in the hall and they left quietly.

Someone had drawn the curtains in the door connecting the foyer and the living room. No one saw them de-

part. Jerry breathed a sigh of relief when they were outside and had found a taxi.

She had lived a year in New York and nothing of any particular interest had happened to her until Alester's silver plane had dropped out of a clear sky upon her camp. Since that event life had become hectic.

How much simpler it would have been for her if only one flyer had come down with the ship! But which one? Jerry did not want to answer that question.

Dan had little to say to her as they drove down Broadway to Columbus Circle. He knew that they stood at a crossroads and that Jerry was headed one way and he another.

He could feel the warmth of her slender, dance-hardened body as she leaned wearily against him in the cab. He made no effort to put an arm around her though his refraining from doing so was taxing his self control to the utmost.

He thought, with longing, of the days of the cave man. Jerry would belong to him if only physical strength were needed to take her. He could crush her in one arm, and fight a dozen Alesters for her with the other.

Dan had always been rather proud of his strength . . . tonight he would have traded it for a gypsy love charm.

Jerry's eyelids drooped. She leaned a little more heavily on Dan without being conscious that she did so. The blessed safety she felt with him was so very blessed, so natural, that she was not even aware of it.

Dan was asking himself where and when he would see her again. He knew that before her show returned for its New York premiere he would have completed the job for which Alester had hired him.

Perhaps he would go west and join the air mail service or take up stunt flying with country town carnivals. There wasn't much kick in safe flying with nothing to live for, he told himself gloomily.

He knew, as Jerry didn't, that Alester would drive her to Atlantic City.

## CHAPTER XXXI

DAN knew Alester Carstairs well. He knew that he held fast to his purpose until it was achieved. And there was no mistaking, a second time, his interest in Jerry.

Alester had fallen hard. Well, Jerry could be relied upon, be trusted, to take care of herself, Dan acknowledged as the cab turned into her street. It looked at last as if she had a good change to marry her million.

When they stopped before her door Jerry opened her eyes and sat up straight. She put out a hand in the semi-darkness of the car and found one of Dan's.

"I'm sorry I got you into trouble," she said softly.

The driver reached around from his seat and opened the door. But his fares made no effort to move.

"Jerry," Dan said suddenly, "this may be the last time I'll see you. You know I love you," he added quickly, briskly.

Jerry withdrew her hand from his.

"No," he said, "I'm not going to make love to you. I know when I've lost," he added, holding his tense voice low. "At times I've thought I'd rather take you up and crash with you than have Alester win you," he went on hurriedly, "but my mind was black with despair in those moments, Jerry. I was afraid that you . . . well, I know better now. But don't be a fool, don't let people talk about you. That might be the one thing that would stand in the way of your ambition."

Jerry's voice came in tones pitched as low as his own, but not so steady, when she answered.

"You're talking in riddles," she said. "I'll never see Alester again."

"Oh, yes you will," Dan assured her. "You're near your goal," he added with a false laugh, "but watch your step. Alester's family won't accept a tarnished reputation."

"Well. . . ."

"You know what I mean," Dan interrupted. "It isn't what you do, Jerry. It's how it looks to the world. Be careful where you're seen and what you do. That ring on your finger—it's Alester's isn't it? Give it back to him and let him keep it until he puts it on to confirm your engagement."

He stopped abruptly and for a few seconds a weighty silence hung between them. It was Jerry's voice—a queer sound, half laugh, half sob—that broke it.

"Why are you so sure that he will want to marry me?" she said, "and that I will want to marry him?"

"Because that is what you both want. Alester may not have known it as soon as you did," he added, "but when a man rushes all the way in from Long Island to a Hundred and Fourth Street just because he suspects that his girl is out with another man it proves that he is jealous. And when Alester is jealous he is jealous of something he wants for himself. That's why I'm warning you not to make it too hard for him when he goes to the mat with his family. You see, Jerry, I know it will come to that. At first I didn't think so, but I didn't know then how much a man could love you."

"Alester doesn't," Jerry said.

"Don't misjudge him," Dan retorted shortly. "Maybe no other girl could stir any real feeling in him, but no man could help loving you, Jerry. . . ."

"But what if—if I don't want him to love me?" Jerry asked, moved by a reckless impulse that was urging her to delay their parting—to hold Dan, to forget Alester and all her well-laid plans.

Dan drew in his breath sharply.

"You want to marry him, don't you?" he asked gratingly.

"I don't know," Jerry cried. "I don't know what I want. I'm afraid . . . it would be terrible to be unhappy all my life!"

"But pleasant," Dan volunteered bitterly, "in marble halls."

"Don't be so cruel," Jerry sobbed.

Dan seized her by the shoulders, none too gently. Her gasping cry reached the ears of the driver who glanced over his shoulder. Then he stuck his hand in his coat pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarets. The scene he had just glimpsed would not be brief, he reasoned. There would be time for a leisurely smoke.

Jerry put her tear-stained face against Dan's while he held her. She wished blindly that he would kiss her.

Dan fought off a corresponding desire. He was slightly bewildered by Jerry's change of heart, and he would not trust it.

He told himself that she did not believe that Alester would return to her. If he took advantage of her emotional weakness now she was sure to regret it when Alester appeared. Moreover, he reminded himself, she never had said, or even hinted, that she loved him. His wish had been father to that thought.

Just because she lay passive in his arms was no assurance that she'd willingly yield to his kisses. She was simply unstrung, and ready to weep on anyone's shoulder. This thought aroused Dan to action. He lifted Jerry away from him and she fell back against the

leather upholstery with a suddenness that surprised her.

Dan stepped out of the cab and turned to assist her. Jerry looked at him with startled eyes. His face now made plainly visible by the street lamp, was grim and set.

A wave of mortification swept over Jerry as she made her way out of the cab. It was with shame that she thought of her yearning to have him kiss her. Why, he despised her!

They walked up the steps to the stoop of the old brownstone house in silence. Jerry quietly fished for her key and inserted it in the lock herself. She pushed the door open and with the silence still unbroken ran blindly up the stairs to her room.

Dan stood in the deserted hall until he heard a door slam. Then he went hurriedly out to the waiting cab and drove off.

Upstairs Jerry was hating herself for her lapse from self-control. What could Dan think of her—except that she was cheap? Openly out to marry one certain man and then doing her best to make another kiss her! It would look that way to Dan.

How could he know that if he'd kissed her in the cab she'd have been just like any other girl who had found her lover? He wouldn't even believe what she had said about Alester, she thought with bitter self-contempt.

Dan was so sure about her there . . . well, she couldn't blame him for that. She had done her best to convince him that all she wanted was a rich marriage. He was wrong about her, though, for just that little moment in the cab—that little moment when she hadn't wanted to marry Alester. He was wrong about Alester, too, she told herself. He wouldn't come back.

Her head ached as she thought of herself as a pendulum swinging between these two men and not knowing

where to stop. But that was over now. She would go to Atlantic City on the train with the troupe.

When Myrtle came in she found Jerry with a towel wet with witch hazel laid across her eyes.

"Well, your blowout did break up early," she remarked in surprise.

"I got a headache," Jerry replied and let it go at that.

It was almost dawn before she fell asleep. Myrtle woke her at seven.

"Aren't you leaving early with Alester?" she asked.

Jerry sat up with a start before she became conscious of the change in her plans.

"No, I'm going on the train," she said, and dropped back on her pillow.

But at eighty-thirty, while she still lay in bed, she heard the doorbell ring in the unmistakable fashion of messenger boys or special delivery postmen. She wondered with small interest if it could be for her. Not likely, she thought.

In a few minutes the landlady came trudging up the stairs and knocked at her door. She went to open it a crack without stopping to put on a kimono. Through the narrow opening she saw a square box with a familiar appearance in the landlady's arms. As she opened the door wider to take the package the landlady snapped: "You'd better get some clothes on; nobody would ever catch me in a nightgown like that."

Jerry ignored her remark. She was interested only in the box and its contents. Orchids, of course. Well, if she got razed for having to "train it" down to Atlantic City at least she could flash \$50 worth of flowers to make up for what she had lost.

No one could have sent them but Alester. She felt in the folds of the green paper for a card. There wasn't any. He hadn't meant them as a peace offering, Jerry

concluded. They must have been ordered before their quarrel of last night.

Jerry took her time about dressing and packing. The train left in the early part of the afternoon. At 12:30 she was putting the last of her things into a black fibre dressing case she had purchased at a sale. At 12:35, as she put on her hat to go out to lunch, the doorbell rang again with that same "I bring news" assurance. This time Jerry was more concerned. It could be word . . . from Dan!

When the door opened she was eagerly peeping over the banister. Then she drew back quickly as the man who stood outside glanced toward the stairs.

It was Alester, and Jerry caught a glimpse of the black and yellow roadster at the curb before she ducked out of sight.

"Ask if Miss Ray is ready to start for Atlantic City," she heard him saying.

"Well, if she isn't I guess it won't take her long to get ready," the landlady retorted. "The way girls dress nowadays. . . ."

Jerry grinned, though she was annoyed. Think of one of Alester's servants greeting a caller like that!

She crept back into her room and closed the door softly while the landlady tramped half way up the stairs and stopped to call out the message in a loud voice.

Jerry threw open the door.

"Yes, what is it?" she said in a high, gay voice. "Oh, Mr. Carstairs?"

She came to the top of the stairs.

"Why, hello Alester," she said to him. "Nice of you to come for me, but I can't leave right now. I've an engagement to lunch at the Ritz."

## CHAPTER XXXII

JERRY could scarcely contain her laughter as she told the hurriedly made-up lie to Alester.

Ask Miss Ray if she's ready to start for Atlantic City, indeed!

She saw the expression on his face change to a black scowl and guessed that he believed she had an engagement with Dan.

She had hoped he would think that Dan was the man but she hadn't dared to announce his name . . . Alester might know it wasn't true.

He wouldn't scowl like that, she told herself, unless Dan's name had popped into his mind. She could be lunching with Evelyn or someone he did not know.

Alester hesitated a moment before speaking. Then: "All right," he said, "I'll drive you over to the hotel. Have your things brought down if they're packed so we won't have to come back for them."

"But I've decided to go on the train," Jerry replied.

"And I've decided to take you," Alester returned. But he said it very pleasantly.

Jerry shrugged. If she could only put over that mythical luncheon engagement she wouldn't mind relenting a bit . . . giving in half-way. But what could she possibly do when she got to the Ritz?

"Come up and get my things," she said, to gain time. "We haven't a porter."

The landlady stood by with watchful mien while

Alester entered Jerry's room to get her suitcase and bag.

Jerry slyly shoved the new dressing case out of sight under the bed.

"Is this all?" Alester asked, taking up the other two pieces.

"That's all," Jerry said with a perfectly straight face.

Then after bidding goodbye to the landlady and giving her a dollar, she followed Alester down the stairs.

On the dresser she had left a note for Myrtle who was out with George. With the note she left \$12 to pay for her share of the rent for two weeks. The girls had agreed not to keep the room together any longer, but Jerry feared Myrtle might not find another place soon. She didn't want her to bear the expense of a double room alone.

She was seated in the car and Alester was shifting into gear when she exclaimed that she had forgotten something. He helped her out of the car.

"I'll be just a minute," she said and ran up the stairs. Once inside the house she went to the pay telephone and dropped a nickel in the slot.

A short wait and she got her number. She was glad that Evelyn answered—it saved time. Then she told her friend what she wanted her to do. Evelyn agreed to do as she was bid but Jerry was conscious of her reluctance. She was sorry that Evelyn did not approve of her plan, but all that mattered now was to have her do as Jerry had requested. "When she knows why," Jerry said to herself, "she will appreciate the joke."

Finishing her call to Evelyn, she rushed upstairs to get her dressing case. And this time when she left the room she thrust the key under the door.

"I'm not used to this case," she explained as Alester took it from her.

"What time is your date?" Alester asked.

"One o'clock."

"You'll be late," he said. "Why don't you 'phone and say you're not coming?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that," Jerry protested. "It's really from one to half past."

"Come in with me," she invited when they stopped before the Ritz.

Alester summoned a doorman to whom he turned over his car and a dollar bill to see that it was well taken care of. He was not a bit loathe to learn who was to be Jerry's luncheon companion. In fact, he had intended to intrude into the situation whether she asked him or not.

Though Jerry was not familiar with the hotel, nevertheless she led the way with well asumed assurance to a certain location in the lobby that appeared to her to be a good meeting place.

Alester was taken in by her air of surprise at finding no one waiting for her.

"He'll be along presently," she said without mentioning any name. "Don't wait if you want to lunch at some other place."

She knew he wouldn't "lunch at some other place." Not even the Rock of Gibraltar seemed firmer in Jerry's mind than Alester's determination as expressed by his stance on the Ritz carpet—his feet apart and his arms folded across his chest.

There was a five-minute wait. And then Jerry was paged in accordance with a prearranged plan. Evelyn was instructed to advise the hotel operator that she would be with Mr. Alester Carstairs. Jerry knew that the mere

mention of his name would bring results that hers would not.

"I'm glad you waited because now I can lunch with you," she said to him a little later. I told D— my friend, that I couldn't wait another 15 minutes—it would make me too late getting started for Atlantic City.

Jerry felt well pleased with herself. She was going to drive down after all, and Alester had no reason to believe that she'd jump through a hoop for him at the snap of his fingers.

They had a delicious luncheon of squab en casserole and a frozen dessert. Jerry looked very smart in her plain blue dress and tight black hat. Alester had checked her old sports coat and she'd pinned the orchids on her shoulder. Not a few people stole frequent glances at her animated countenance. Jerry tried to forget Dan Harvey.

The drive to Atlantic City was delightful. It was one of those fall days when the sunshine is like liquid gold and the sky as blue as Irish eyes. The cushioned seats of the roadster were deep and soft-sprung. Jerry relaxed and told herself to enjoy the good the gods provided and stop thinking of a lean brown man who held you like a gorilla against a pounding heart but would not kiss you . . .

She had thrilled to the Holland tunnel under the Hudson River—to the gently winding curves and unchecked speed, and to the thought of a great stream flowing over her head.

Was she—Jerry Ray—wearing orchids and riding beside a millionaire in an imported car, the same Jerry Ray who, a few short weeks before, had counted her pennies and pulled down the heels of her stockings to hide the darns?

Yes, she guessed she was. The coat she wore proved it. Well, anyway, she would soon be able to send her mother a coat with a fur collar. And she could fold this old thing over her arm when she got to her hotel. She hoped she wouldn't need a warm wrap in Atlantic City.

They stopped at a gas station later on and Jerry removed her coat. Alester noticed that she tried to hide the worn lining. When he got back in the car he casually drew it over to his side and when Jerry became absorbed in the scenery he managed to drop it out of the car.

"Cold?" he asked her presently.

"Yes," she said, "I think I'll put my coat on."

When she discovered that it was missing Alester inquired if she had anything of value in the pockets. Jerry said no.

"Then, if you don't mind wearing my topcoat, I'd rather not go back for yours," Alester told her. "It must have been picked up by this time anyhow."

"But I haven't another heavy coat," Jerry wailed.

"It was my fault," Alester declared. "You'll have to let me get you another in Atlantic City. He handed her his light topcoat and helped Jerry put it on. Then he took the wheel again and in a few seconds they were spinning along at 45.

Well, she'd have to send her mother a coat without a fur collar now, Jerry told herself. She hadn't resisted Alester's subsidizing instincts thus far only to yield over the loss of an old coat. She could make up for the fur with a dress later on. She wondered if clothes were very expensive on the Boardwalk.

But perhaps she'd better not buy anything more until after the show opened. Everyone said it was going to be a hit, but Jerry had been reading the theatrical news

with great fidelity. She discovered that an appalling number of shows flopped.

What would she do if "Summertime" rolled over and kicked up its legs? No job! No money—not even a hall bedroom she could go back to!

The day lost some of its brightness for Jerry. There wasn't a dark cloud in the sky but her spirits dropped like a barometer before a storm. She kept her eyes on the road looking for bumps.

When they were down past Asbury Park she asked Alester if they'd reach Atlantic City before dark.

"Yes," he said, "we'll do 70 pretty soon."

"Take me to the Everett Hotel," she said. "Evelyn's staying there."

"Wouldn't you come to the Ambassador as my guest if I asked Miss Starr to share a suit with you?" Alester said pleadingly. "You don't know how I feel, Jerry, having so much money that isn't making life any pleasanter for you."

"But it is," Jerry responded instantly. "Why! I'd be back in New York watching the clock right now if it weren't for you. And I'd probably be having a roastbeef sandwich for dinner. Evelyn says the Everett is a nice place."

"Well, would you come to a little party?" Alester urged. "I've wired for rooms."

"Not tonight," Jerry said firmly. "We're going to work all day tomorrow for our final dress rehearsal."

"Tomorrow night, after the show?" Alester appealed. "You must come, then, Jerry; the party's in your honor."

"Who will be there?"

"The whole show."

Jerry frowned. "Drinks?" she asked.

“Well, for those who want them.”

Jerry said nothing more. She was thinking of what Dan had said to her about keeping her reputation unsullied, and suddenly she knew that she didn't want to go to a party Alester would throw—and not because she hoped to marry him.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

JERRY felt it was about time to let Alester know that she wasn't his idea of what a chorus girl should be like.

"It's sure to be a rough party," she prophesied when he repeated his invitation to his celebration of the opening of the show.

"It will be an experience for you," Alester told her earnestly. "You don't know anything about the show business yet, Jerry."

"But you asked me not to mix with the other girls," Jerry reminded him.

"This is different," Alester explained quickly. "I'll look after you, and we can't have a party without them."

"Yes, we could," Jerry differed. "We could have Evelyn and maybe Miss Spear. . . ."

"And play tiddledewinks," Alester broke in with a laugh. "Be sensible, Jerry."

"Don't worry, I'm sensible," she flared at him. "People are talking about us and I'm not going to any wild affair to give them food for more gossip. And what's more, here's your ring—I've decided not to keep it."

With a quick gesture Jerry tore off her glove and pulled the emerald ring from her finger. Alester made no move to take it.

"What's got into you?" he asked blankly.

"You might as well know," Jerry conceded as she

thrust the ring into his hand. "You will probably hear it anyway. Dan had a fight last night with Jael Thane because Jael said I wasn't good enough to go to a decent girl's house. . . ."

"Why, I'll wring his neck!" Alester declared explosively; "and what's more I'll see that he gets the gate."

"No, you won't," Jerry warned. "Jael is right. I mean he thought he was—it doesn't look so very innocent for a poor girl to have a friend like you."

"Hooey!" Alester exclaimed impatiently.

"Well, I don't want to be talked about," Jerry returned firmly. "That's why I'm not going to your party."

"You're a funny kid," Alester said grumpily. "I used to think that you had ideas about—now don't get peeved—about marrying me."

He glanced toward Jerry and was surprised when she nodded in assent.

"Well, for a girl who's out with a ball and chain to tag a guy you're mighty independent," he went on. "Changed your mind?" he added as he eased on the gas for a longer look at her.

Jerry smiled a completely mirthless little smile that died upon her lips.

"You're safe," she said, "as far as I'm concerned."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Alester demanded.

Jerry would not explain. In fact she hardly heard him. She was deep in thought—considering the danger to which he might be exposing himself—the danger of being ambushed by the mythical little person whose trouble-laden darts always reached the spot.

She was telling herself that if a man fell hopelessly in love with a girl it didn't matter if she warmed or chilled to his advances, the result would be the same—he'd pursue her even if her had to swim an ocean.

Perhaps a girl could get her man, even if he wasn't in love with her—if she tried. In the beginning she had tried—had wanted to make him propose to her, but now she was satisfied to let the power of love motivate him.

She no longer had any desire to capture her millionaire in the purely impersonal manner which she had discussed with Myrtle at the beginning of her summer vacation.

She had changed since that time. Even the thought of marrying Alester was beginning to take on a tinge of dread and Jerry was afraid of this new sensation—afraid that she would welsh . . . be like other girls. She, who had learned in time to find her way out of the age-old path that led to disillusionment.

Her high talk—"high flight," her brother had called it . . . what would it amount to if she failed to live up to it when opportunity knocked at her door?

She passed a hand wearily across her eyes. What had she done to encourage this uncertain state of mind? Wasn't the road clear before her? She might be placing too much reliance upon the God of Love. It might be fatal not to do as Alester wished.

But there was someone whose eyes would grow troubled and anxious if he knew she'd go to a "live" affair—someone whom she was reluctant to displease even though he were ignorant of it.

She might not be Dan Harvey's ideal, she told herself unhappily, but at least she could strive to be as near this goal as she possibly could without giving up her cherished ambition.

Alester grumbled when she persisted in declining his invitation. Jerry recklessly disregarded his remarks without counting the cost. He left her at the Everett—Evelyn had already engaged a double room which she

and Jerry would share—and drove off without saying when he would see her again.

Jerry tried to appear indifferent about it. But when Evelyn spoke of dinner she found an excuse to linger a few minutes. Alester might call her.

The telephone remained mute.

"Let's walk a bit," Evelyn suggested when they reached the Boardwalk. Jerry was pleased with the prospect. Her summer coat was warm enough and the brisk breeze that blew in off the Atlantic set aflame her stirred-up feelings.

Evelyn noted the belligerent thrust of her chin into the wind and was reminded that most people walk with head down against a stiff breeze.

Jerry seemed to be in a fighting mood. Evelyn suspected that she had quarreled with Alester. She hastened her steps a trifle. She had a mood of her own to dispel, but for her the future was as blank as the endless expanse of ocean that lay before them.

The brisk walk and the thrill of experiencing things new to her helped to calm Jerry. She took a belated interest in her surroundings and wondered at the unexpected absence of gay throngs on the Boardwalk.

"Wait until later in the evening," Evelyn told her when Jerry spoke of it. "Everyone's at dinner now. I know a good place farther on. Hungry?"

"No, but we'd better go if we have to report to the theater at nine."

Down a few blocks they turned off the Boardwalk and into an unpretentious entrance. Once inside, however, Jerry was amazed to find it a Moorish palace.

"I'll have a sandwich," she said, and then, with a funny little laugh, "a roastbeef sandwich with gravy."

Evelyn regarded her curiously.

"Oh do take something more appetizing than that," she advised.

"No," Jerry replied firmly, "that's what I want. I don't like it much but it will be good for me."

Evelyn was at a loss to know what she meant. Jerry did not explain. Squabs for lunch—with Alester. A sandwich for dinner—without Alester. It was symbolical, a lesson—a lesson that would be good for her. . . .

They lingered over coffee without dessert. Mr. Hule had forbidden them to eat sweets at night. When they left the place they became aware that there was just time, by walking fast, to reach the theater by nine o'clock. They preferred the walk to riding in a rolling chair.

They were not expected to rehearse tonight. It made no difference if they tired a little. But Jerry found a surprise in store for her. Mr. Hule wanted her with the five girls who made up a special number to rehearse it a few times because one of them had neglected to show up on two occasions.

"I'm too tired, Mr. Hule," she said. "I've just walked a mile and a half."

Mr. Hule was on the verge of exploding when his better judgment came to his rescue. Jerry had been a pleasant surprise to him. He'd had no trouble with her and he'd given her plenty to kick about if she'd been inclined to carry her troubles to Mr. Weinertz.

"All right," he acquiesced. "But do your limbering up in the theater hereafter."

Evelyn and Jerry returned to their hotel in a rolling chair.

"Do you know I think Mr. Hule likes you," Evelyn said in a voice that carried a note of surprise in it.

"It got his goat not to get mine," Jerry answered.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he gave you a solo bit," Evelyn predicted.

"No such luck; I'm not good enough for that."

"Sure you are, don't let your opportunity slip, Jerry. No matter what you're after in life, it will be easier to reach from one step up."

Jerry sighed. Maybe Evelyn was right, she thought. She was sure that Alester had changed toward her since she'd discarded her shopgirl role. "If going on the stage is up," she mused; "but I suppose it's 'up' to Alester." She wasn't so sure about Dan.

Well, what did it matter? She wouldn't see Dan again. If Alester asked her to marry him. . . .

Jerry counted sheep that night until long after Evelyn had fallen asleep. The next morning she was listless and pale. Evelyn insisted upon a short, brisk walk before breakfast.

At 10 they were on the stage and Jerry was anxious to work, but there'd been a change of plans. The leads had been called early and the chorus stood around in costume, waiting.

"Don't sit down," the wardrobe mistress cautioned the girls when she came along and found some of them perched upon a "prop" table. "Those costumes weren't made to sit in."

A girl standing in the wings sneezed suddenly.

Mr. Hule heard her.

"You," he called, "come here."

With defiance in her carriage and expression the girl walked over to him.

"Were you at young Carstairs' midnight swimming party?" he demanded harshly.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

EVELYN, standing beside Jerry, saw her start at Mr. Hule's words.

"Well, what of it?" the girl answered the director. "I'm here when you want me. That's all that concerns you."

Mr. Hule glowered at her.

"You'll be out of the show if you develop a cold," he said. "I won't have you sneezing around here."

"What do you expect?" the girl retorted. "Standing around this barn for hours half dressed would make anybody sneeze."

"Don't try to alibi. I heard about that affair," Hule told her. "It's a wonder you didn't get run in."

"Too bad we didn't," the girl came back at him. "That would have been hot publicity for the show. 'Nude Girls Swim at Millionaire's Party!' Great idea. I'll have to pass it on to Alester."

Evelyn reached out for Jerry's hand. "She's lying," she whispered.

Jerry nodded. She didn't believe the girl was telling the truth, but it could not be denied that Alester had given a party at which she was not present. Jerry tried to tell herself that it was none of her business, but she could not put down a feeling of resentment.

Before she had refused to attend the party he planned to give on the opening night Alester had asked her to

have dinner with him. Just because he had not liked her refusal did not justify his breaking the dinner engagement, she felt. But she wouldn't have minded if he hadn't consoled himself with an impromptu affair.

And this girl calling him Alester . . . several of the girls were looking at her, Jerry saw. She made an effort to hide her agitation.

Evelyn stuck close to her until they were called for rehearsal. It was long after lunch and Jerry felt faint. There was grumbling on all sides, but it was without design.

"No one is to leave the stage," Mr. Hule had called out a short while before. "We're going to make some last-minute changes."

The chorus worked for half an hour, then gave way to other members of the company.

Jerry saw the two men who had written the scores and lyrics for Summertime down front with Mr. Weinertz, engaged in heated conversation. They came up on the stage presently and Mr. Hule joined them.

Then some of the principals were assembled and given directions for a rehearsal of the contemplated changes.

Jerry groaned. "If I could only park myself somewhere for five minutes," she said to Evelyn, "I might survive."

"This is the hardest part of working on the stage," Evelyn announced; "this ghastly waiting around with nothing to do."

At five o'clock, when Jerry felt that she would collapse in another minute, the entire company was dismissed.

"Get something to eat and then rest," Mr. Hule advised the chorus for the benefit of the new girls. "Take a bath and go to bed—in nightgowns," he added sternly.

"Nightgowns!" one girl said sotto voice; "why bother? After this afternoon that would be too much."

Jerry glanced at the costume the girl was wearing. She had to agree that in comparison to it a nightgown was a full-grown wardrobe. When first she had seen it she'd been glad she wasn't cast with the girls who had to wear it. Fortunately she came into the show too late for that.

There was a scramble outside the theater for rolling chairs and Jerry and Evelyn missed getting one. They were just turning away to go down to one of the side streets in search of a cab when they saw Alester coming toward them.

Jerry regarded him with cold silence, but Evelyn greeted him pleasantly.

She did not know what he and Jerry had quarreled about, but she believed they ought to make up. Nothing short of tragedy seemed important to Evelyn. Her own life, she felt, was a tragedy—a tragedy of futility.

"May I drive you to your hotel?" Alester asked, looking at Evelyn.

"We'll be glad to have you," she answered cordially. "Come on, Jerry; we haven't much time."

Jerry did not wish to create a scene. She went along as Alester led the way to the black roadster and sat between him and Evelyn without protest when the latter stepped aside to allow her to get into the car first.

"Shall we stop at the Ambassador for a bite to eat?" Alester asked, turning to Jerry.

She saw that his eyes were rimmed with shadows and that he looked haggard beneath his fresh grooming.

She shook her head. "There's a little place across the street from the Everett," she said. "You can drop us there."

Alester understood that she didn't want to have tea, or supper, or dinner, or whatever it was, with him. He set his lips in hard lines. He guessed she'd heard about last night's party. Well, she'd have to learn that he was accustomed to do as he pleased about such things.

He brought his car to a stop in front of the small restaurant with a suddenness that revealed his state of mind. Evelyn began to think she had made a mistake in letting him come along.

Jerry offered no objections to having him go in with them. She was not settled in any definite conviction about him. She had no right to be angry with him, she told herself—and yet she was. But she didn't feel as if she never wanted to see him again. Her inclination was to fight it out with him. But she couldn't do that with Evelyn present, and she didn't want to send him away until he knew what she thought of him.

Their simple meal of clear soup, a poached egg and milk was soon finished. Alester drank a cup of coffee in an effort to quiet his shaking nerves.

"What time are you going back to the theater?" he asked when they walked across the street to the hotel.

Jerry did not reply, though Evelyn waited for her to do so. The silence became awkward, at least to her.

"We can't say," she said finally. "But don't bother; we can telephone for a cab."

"I'll be back in half an hour," Alester said. "You won't leave before?" he added, appealing to Jerry.

"I don't think we could," she said dryly.

Alester left them at the street door. Up in their room Evelyn said: "Don't be too hard on him, Jerry. He's been brought up to be a playboy. You will have to lead him out of it and not try to drive him."

Jerry stood at the window, watching Alester drive off. He had stopped to light a cigaret. He looked very handsome in his snappy car. There was an assurance about his movements that attracted her. Obviously he was used to having things his way, and Jerry was not immune to the charm of a personality that had developed from conditions utterly foreign to her.

That it was a personality that could not endure being shorn of power and glamorous background she did not realize. Perhaps Evelyn was right, she thought, and her prudery was silly when used as a standard for Alester's conduct.

But at least she could set standards for herself. He should not make her break them.

When Alester returned in evening clothes to take them to the theater her anger had left her, but in its place there was a cold determination not even to be tempted to attend his party. She supposed he hadn't cancelled it.

Jerry had been thinking so intently of her own affairs that she had escaped the general excitement of the occasion. Even as she applied her makeup and got into her costume for the first act she did not feel nervous. Evelyn guessed at this and refrained from speaking about her own stage fright.

The half-hour call had come a few minutes after they entered the dressing room. Evelyn had watched Jerry to see that she did not lag over her preparations. Now and then she had given a word of advice in a casual tone to her less experienced friend.

"Fifteen minutes! Fifteen minutes! Fifteen minutes!" Jerry knew the voice of the assistant stage director. It did not disturb her.

But when it came again, "First act, First act, First

act," she grew suddenly cold and sick. "First act!" meant the wings. In about three minutes she would be out there on the stage and the curtain would be up.

A sea of faces swam before her imagination, receded, crowded in upon her.

Evelyn put an arm on her shoulders. "It's always a friendly audinece on the first night," she said soothingly; "but you must try to forget them, Jerry. Can't you think of something very, very important to you? How pleased your family will be . . ."

Her voice was drowned in the clamor that broke out among the girls with whom they were hurrying toward the wings. Jerry felt as though she were moved by some motion over which she had no control. She remembered that horrible moment when she had attempted to dance for Mr. Weinertz at her first tryout. Would she be like that tonight on the stage before everyone?

"I'm freezing," she tried to say to Evelyn, but even her voice had dropped to a croaking whisper. She closed her eyes and clenched her hands, seeking self-control with all the power of will that she possessed.

A thing she used to say when she was a child returned to her. "Well, if you can do it I can." She opened her eyes and looked at the girls about her. They would go on and dance. She'd never heard of a whole company becoming paralyzed with stage fright. "If they can, I can," she told herself hopefully.

She turned her face to the stage. Two people were out there speaking their lines. Jerry thought their voices sounded unnatural and she saw a bit of business go wrong. But it did not seem to matter. The audience hadn't caught on. Perhaps they didn't watch so closely after all . . .

The cue for the chorus!

"Well," Jerry thought, "I guess Atlantic City isn't going to pay so much attention to me—but Alester is going to see that he hasn't wished a flat tire onto Mr. Weinertz."

## CHAPTER XXXV

JERRY kept her eyes off the audience as long as she could, but finally succumbed to the temptation to look over the footlights. She was dancing in the first row of girls, near the end.

She glanced quickly at the box just a few feet away from her, thinking that Alester might be in it. She did not locate him there. He had said he was going out front when he left her and Evelyn at the stage door.

Jerry felt a little chill of apprehension come over her. It dispelled a degree of her stage fright. Had she been too severe—too independent?

Blamety blam blam blam! The music was growing faster. Jerry's body began to free itself of tautness. She looked straight out over the footlights and tried to smile, remembering that Mr. Hule had told them not to let their faces "set."

She saw rows and rows of people who melted into an indistinguishable, composite picture. A picture that carried to Jerry an impression of opulence, of carefree interest. Indistinctly she saw the white shirt fronts of men in evening dress, the richer accents of women's gowns.

In the first row a woman lifted her hands to applaud. Jerry caught the flash of jewels on her wrist. The woman's companion was watching Jerry, trying to make her look at him. Jerry skipt her eyes over his head, seeking Alester.

She found herself thrilling now to the knowledge that her stage fright had passed, that actually she was before the public and enjoying it. The spell of the theater began to weave itself about her. The music crept into her blood, the applause showered her with tingling gratification.

Curtain! A thunder of applause. Hysterical people congratulating themselves and each other in the relief of the moment.

Mr. Hule, grim. "Wait," he said.

"No, man! No!" It was the producer, a hand on his director's shoulder. "We're going over. When a first act gets them like that . . ."

"They'll tire."

Jerry heard no more. Encore! For the star, of course, but the audience wanted the chorus, too—the little girls in bridesmaids' costumes. Jerry was one of them.

Delicious shivers shook her when she took her first curtain call. She was part of a hit! Part of something the public liked.

Back in the dressing room Evelyn waited to congratulate her. To them the show was Jerry's. The star was merely an adjunct. Jerry had made good. Nothing else mattered.

Tears sneaked down Jerry's cheeks when Evelyn hugged and kissed her. "Aren't we funny?" she said. "Who saw me?"

"Mr. Hule did," Evelyn replied. "Oh, darling, you danced divinely."

"Hurry into your change," the wardrobe mistress called, and Jerry turned obediently to her dressing table.

"Flowers for Miss Ray," someone yelled from the door.

Jerry started to run toward it, but Evelyn pulled her back. "Let Mrs. Dwight get them," she said, "you haven't time." The wardrobe mistress hurried over to the door and soon returned with a long box in her arms.

Jerry couldn't stop to open it. She had to go scurrying with the other girls back to the stage, climbing the steps from the dressing room and threading her way through the piled-up scenery.

There was a generous round of applause when the curtain went up for the second act and then there occurred one of those things that make life in the theater so uncertain.

The show died. The promise of the first act was unfulfilled. Relaxed nerves grew tight again; smiling faces became strained. The audience had not applauded the big scene in the second act. Everyone knew then that the show would be a flop unless new life could be put into it before the curtain was lowered.

Mr. Hule was tearing his hair. Mr. Weinertz, out front with his guests, mouthed an imaginary cigar between his lips and groaned inwardly.

Someone leaned over to him and whispered: "Too much costume."

Mr. Weinertz nodded. He knew it; he'd told Harsell his big idea was no good. You couldn't whet jaded appetites by overdressing the girls just to add a kick to their scanty appearance in the last act, he'd said, and now he knew it was true!

He got up and made his way backstage in search of the man who had led him into committing this stupid blunder. The culprit was found in an argument with the stage director.

"You've got to do something!" the producer cried frantically. "We're dying!"

"All right," Harsell replied, "we'll step it up. Instead of waiting for the third act we'll introduce the bathing girls here. Get busy, Hule."

"Wait a minute," Mr. Weinertz exclaimed. "What are you going to have in place of those girls in the third act?"

Mr. Harsell pinched his lower lip thoughtfully. "Let's see . . . put the caps and aprons on the bathing suits for this act," he said sardonically, "then we'll have the caps and aprons for the third act. I'm afraid we can't go any farther . . ."

"Hell," Mr. Weinertz exploded in disgust. "Let it alone." He turned to Mr. Hule. "Tell Ted and Leonard to throw in some of their old stuff when they go on," he snapped. "That dragon fight—sort of burlesque their old hit, and if the audience doesn't warm up to your cute little surprise when you spring it in the third, Harsell, you'd better go stab yourself on a sword-fish. The ocean's full of 'em."

The audience remained silent and unmoved until near the end of the second act. Then Ted Hart and Leonard Glass got them with their funny stuff. It was recognized as a favorite bit of a past season being done over, but the way the boys made fun of themselves went over big.

The empty seats that Mr. Weinertz had expected to see when the curtain was raised for the last act were not there. He wiped a perspiring forehead and went back to his friends. His collar was limp and the long lock of hair he used to cover his baldness hung down the back of his head.

He knew that success hung in the balance. If the audience failed to react favorably to Harsell's big surprise he didn't want to read the papers the next morning, the

producer told himself when he took his seat, beside his wife. No show, he added, could live on the skeleton of a former hit.

The audience had remained—that was encouraging, but the gala air had departed from the theater. There was no longer an expectancy, a keyed-up note in the atmosphere. People were waiting to have it over with so they could get to some more exciting entertainment.

No one applauded the first scene of the third act—the host and hostess of the bride and groom at a fete on a country estate. The two were discussing the program they had prepared for their guests. It promised nothing exciting.

But it proved to be quite different. The guests were entertained by a group of waterbabies from a Broadway revue. The backdrop curtain had parted to reveal to an astonished audience—the real audience—a glass swimming pool. And no one, now, made a complaint against the costumes.

Jerry had never ceased, since she first saw that scene, to thank her lucky star that she'd told Mr. Hule the truth when he asked about her swimming. She had said she was not very good, which was the truth.

She was well satisfied to be a waitress and carry trays of prop drinks to the guests. Evelyn and Miss Spear were among them. Jerry's exceptionally well shaped legs had drawn her the abbreviated skirt that theatrical tradition has associated with the French maids of musical comedy since time immemorial.

She carried her tray with poise, but though her nerves were quiet her eyes were not attuned to them. She had not succeeded in locating Alester. The flowers he sent had softened her heart; she wanted to let him know it.

Others in the chorus had received flowers, too, and

telegrams, but the messages had been received at their hotels, or earlier in the day at the theater. Yet no one had a more gorgeous bouquet than Alester sent to Jerry. The incomparable American Beauty rose; two dozen of them.

Alester could well afford them—or two dozen orchids if he wished—Jerry knew, but she appreciated his wanting to make her proud that someone had considered her little stage debut worthy of being remembered.

Her eyes searched the audience at every chance. Where could he be?

The show was nearing the final curtain. Jerry had a minute off stage to fly down to the dressing room. Yes, there was word for her; a telegram, Mrs. Dwight told her, but she could not give it to her until after the show.

"Why?" Jerry pleaded.

"It's against the rules in Mr. Weinertz's productions."

"But the show's almost over!"

"Then you can wait," Mrs. Dwight said firmly. "I never break the rule, Miss."

Jerry rushed back to the wings. "Hurry," Evelyn cried, as she saw Jerry come running up the stairs. "What in the world did you do that for?" she whispered a second later as they danced out to join the company in ensemble for the closing song.

"Mrs. Dwight has a telegram for me and she wouldn't let me have it," Jerry whispered back.

"Of course not," Evelyn replied under her breath. "It's a precaution against bad news upsetting a performer during the show."

The last of her words were lost in the wild applause that broke out and swept up over the footlights—applause that came like a reprieve to threatened toilers.

"Bad news!" Jerry hadn't thought of that. And why,

she asked herself now, should Alester send her a telegram when he was in the house?

The elation of the people about her, the last and greatest burst of sound from the orchestra, the laughing, clapping audience suddenly meant nothing to her.

She danced on, mechanically, until she found herself in the wings. But she could not yet get away—the audience was calling the company back. Six curtains were taken and by that time Jerry was sure that some terrible thing had happened at her home. Who else would wire to her?

She had forgotten Alester. But just as she turned to hasten to the dressing-room she saw him—and with him was Leontine Lebaudy.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

JERRY stopped short in surprise as Leontine rushed up to her and began pouring out enthusiastic congratulations.

"We've been sitting in an upper box," she declared excitedly, admiring you, but you wouldn't look up at us."

"I wondered where you were," Jerry said to Alester with simple truthfulness.

"Leontine put me in a rear seat," he laughed. "I had one in the first row but when she phoned that she wanted a ticket I was obliged to exchange mine for two in a box. They had to put in extra chairs for us and I missed most of the show," he added complainingly.

"I dashed down to see you open," Leontine said to Jerry, "because you were such a mouse when I first met you and I wanted to see for myself that you really had become a chorus girl."

"That . . . was nice of you," Jerry said politely. "Will you excuse me now? I must get to the dressing-room. There's a telegram for me," she added, lest she appear rude.

"We will wait for you," Alester said. "I've got a flock of chair cars outside to take everyone to the hotel."

Jerry had started to turn away. Now she hesitated. "I'm not coming," she said quietly.

"Jerry!" Alester strode up to her and caught her by

the arm. "Jerry you will make a fool of me. I've told everyone I'm giving this party for you."

"I'm sorry," Jerry said, shrugging herself free. "I told you I would not go."

Leontine laughed very softly. "Perhaps you'd better let Miss Ray read her message," she said to Alester. Then, to Jerry: "May I come to the dressing-room with you?"

Jerry could think of no excuse for refusing her. She might have tried harder, perhaps, had she not been too excited to foresee the introduction she would be obliged to make between Leontine and Evelyn if she took the former to the dressing-room.

Evelyn, seeing that Alester had brought someone to Jerry, had slipped away. She had tied a towel around her head and was patting cold cream on her face to remove the grease paint when Jerry and Leontine came in.

Jerry introduced them and something in Evelyn's manner told her that her friend had drawn an invisible line about herself. But she had no time to consider what Evelyn would think of Leontine. She wanted her telegram.

Mrs. Dwight gave it to her and Jerry opened it with trembling fingers under Leontine's watchful eyes. The latter saw an expression of infinite relief pass over Jerry's face and give way to one of tenderness. A soft little smile played tremulously in the corners of the girl's lips as she refolded the sheet of paper and put it back in the envelope.

Evelyn was regarding her anxiously, Jerry saw. "It's good wishes from a friend," she said, "the young man I brought to your apartment."

She had not thought of Leontine, or that she might

carry word of the message from Dan back to Alester.

"Well, since you have no bad news, are you coming to the party?" Leontine asked her.

Jerry felt that she hung upon the answer. Perhaps she was being very unwise, unless she wanted to lose Alester, to treat him so harshly when there was a woman like Leontine Lebaudy on hand to soothe his ruffled feelings, Jerry told herself. But she couldn't reverse her decision after Alester had broken his dinner engagement with her and given a "spite party" that might not have been so bad as it was pictured, but certainly couldn't have been very innocent.

"Tell him I'll go to my hotel and if I change my mind I'll come over," she said to Leontine.

"Jerry, you may be driving Alester away from you," Evelyn warned her when Leontine left, with a smile of triumph that she could not conceal.

"You know what that party will be like," Jerry returned.

"Yes, it will be gay, I know," Evelyn conceded; "but everyone will be there. Even Mr. Weinertz and Mr. Harsell. Mrs. Weinertz, too.

"Alester's first night parties are institutions," she went on. "I'm sorry you refused. That isn't the way to stop Alester from sowing his wild oats. You know what he did last night. He wouldn't have. . . . I suppose you quarreled over this party," she added, half inquiringly.

"Yes," Jerry admitted. "But I'm not trying to keep Alester straight, Evelyn. I'm just trying to stop people from talking about me. I might have changed my mind, though, and gone to his party if Miss Lebaudy had not been with him, but I don't think so," she concluded slowly, remembering the message from Dan.

"Well, I'm sure your decision pleased Miss Lebaudy, at least," Evelyn remarked dryly. "Who is she, Jerry?"

Jerry told her all she knew of Leontine. "I wonder if Alester asked her to come to Atlantic City?" she ended.

"I doubt it," Evelyn declared with a great deal of emphasis. They had been speaking in subdued voices because of the presence of other members of the chorus, but now the room was fast becoming deserted.

Someone had overheard what Jerry said to Leontine, however, and word was passed that she and Alester were "missing fire." But the only really important thing, in the girls' estimation, was to get to his party and find out what the favors were.

A strange silence fell upon Jerry as she drove to her hotel with Evelyn. She had no intention of going to the party. What she had said to Leontine had been intended to keep Alester from urging her further. It wouldn't have done so had Leontine repeated it truthfully.

"She wants to go to her hotel first," she said to Alester. "To dress, I think. You'd better come along—some of your guests will be waiting for you. Besides, I want to know why you didn't show up at my place on Saturday night."

Her voice was fraught with a significance that Alester did not care to ignore. They went out to his car and as they drove to his hotel he made up some excuse for having broken his date with her. It did not approach the truth and Leontine knew it, but she was too wise to question him.

Her hold upon him was growing very slender—time-worn, she called it. But he had not yet reached the point where her fascination failed to appeal to him. At times he forgot Jerry when he thought of Leontine.

But she had tricked him and he'd discovered it; since then she had held him only by the fullest exertion of her charm.

Tonight neither of them wanted to quarrel. Alester wasn't ready to break and Leontine was fearful of it.

But Jerry always rode uppermost in his thoughts when she seemed most remote.

When an hour had passed after his party was well under way in the suite of reception rooms he had engaged for the occasion and she had not arrived, he went in search of her.

Jerry was in bed and no amount of pleading over the telephone could induce her to get up and dress. Evelyn offered to lend her the new evening gown she'd never worn but Jerry steadfastly refused to attend the party.

Alester went back to his guests with a cold anger rising with him. Leontine glided to his side and put her hands on his arm.

She was dressed in cloth of gold, a sheer fabric into which pure gold had been sprayed, and her skin was covered with tawny makeup. Her black hair was tight against her shapely head and her big black eyes were pools of emotional depths.

As she leaned against Alester and smiled up at him, he was reminded of a Bengal tigress. Black and gold. "Golden skin and a black soul," he laughed.

She was a woman for a man—not that little white kitten with her prim "don't touch me" attitude.

He put an arm around Leontine's waist and walked with her to the improvised bar. They drank cocktails. There was a room for dancing. Leontine swayed in rhythm with the music.

"Drag me around," she said, putting down her glass. In the dance she made love to him. Her perfume,

her eyes, her laughter—she used them all, and an arm about his neck, caressing fingers stealing up to his ear.

At supper she had made him forget Jerry completely. He gave her Jerry's place beside his own. And he gave her something else that he had meant for Jerry. It was a square case that Leontine opened with eagerness.

A jade bracelet, set with a priceless emerald, lay on the white satin lining. Leontine emitted a cry of admiration and slipped the jewel upon her arm.

"Here's . . . " Alester fumbled in his pockets for the jade and emerald ring. He'd have given that to Leontine, too, had it not been in the pocket of the suit he'd worn down from New York.

Leontine admired the bracelet and thought what a fool Jerry was.

Jerry, asleep with her head on a pillow beneath which she had tucked a precious piece of paper, was dreaming of a man with dark blue eyes and a very, very stubborn chin. He was going to kiss her.

That part of her dream Jerry remembered very clearly in the morning, but she could not remember why he hadn't.

Evelyn had called to her suddenly and sent her dream recollections out of her head for the moment with the demand that she look at the paper.

Evelyn had read it quietly up to a certain point. Then, "Oh, Jerry," she cried and jumped out of bed to run over and shake Jerry by the shoulders. "Jerry, you've got a notice! Listen to what the critics have to say about you."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

It was a very short notice that Jerry received in the review of Summertime, but to her and Evelyn it was fame. They locked arms and danced around the room in high spirits.

For both knew that when a chorus girl got a line in the papers someone was going to sit up and take notice of her. The critic had referred to her by place and not by name, as one reason for Jake Weinertz's leadership in the business of assembling feminine pulchritude.

"I knew it," Evelyn exclaimed. "You're on the road to success, Jerry."

Suddenly Jerry caught sight of her reflection in the mirror, and of Evelyn's. Her friend's shell-pink pajamas had been made in France, Jerry knew, tiny stitch by tiny stitch. Her own robe de nuit was a flimsy peach voile, trimmed with machine-made lace.

Success! French lingerie! She stopped dancing and turned her suddenly-serious eyes upon Evelyn.

"But he didn't say anything about my work," she cried with dismay. Evelyn knew she referred to the critic's review.

"Well, he certainly wouldn't have mentioned you at all if your work wasn't good," she declared stoutly.

"But I haven't any real talent. You know that," Jerry lamented. "I'm only on the stage by luck."

"You haven't any ambition," Evelyn rejoined impa-

tiently. "Just because you haven't a magic lamp to rub . . ."

"I won't turn down any offers," Jerry interposed laughingly, 'but I'm afraid it will be a long, long time before I can see my way to the top. And I want to get to the top somewhere," she added wistfully. "I want to have things, Evelyn, nice things like yours."

Evelyn stared at her in wonder. "Things?" she repeated. "Why, Jerry, things are . . . just things. They don't count."

"Yes they do!" Jerry differed fiercely. "They count more than you've any idea. You're glad, aren't you, Evelyn, that you know about books and pictures and good taste and lovely manners . . ."

"It isn't fashionable to have manners," Evelyn put in, but Jerry took no notice of the interruption.

"Do you think you would be what you are if you'd grown up in an old unpainted house that was little better than a tumbledown shack and eaten your meals in a kitchen with a rusty stove that your men folks used for a cuspidor . . ."

"I think I'd have polished the stove and dreamed about a knight on a white charger who would come and ask me to bake him a sweet cake," Evelyn said softly.

"Of course you do!" Jerry agreed heatedly; "that's what everyone thinks who's never known what it's like to be poor. Love in a cottage! A lot of romance you'd find in a dust pan!

"Oh I know we could have polished the stove, but you don't know what poverty does to you. It stifles your finer feelings—you get so you don't care. That's what I was afraid it would do to me—what it did to my father and my brother. But my mother is different—

only she always had something to do to earn a little extra money. Stove polish costs money, too," she ended, in a dry sob.

Evelyn hurried over to throw her arms about her.

"Dear, dear, I didn't understand," she said soothingly.

"I've got to have money to take my mother out of that," Jerry cried, drawing away from her.

"But Jerry, it doesn't take much money to improve such conditions as those. Why, dear, you will soon be able to help your mother a great deal."

"While I'm working," Jerry amended excitedly. "And when I'm out of a job? What then? If the show had failed . . . oh I wish I hadn't been so stubborn last night," she wailed. "You were right, Evelyn; I've driven Alester away and . . . and . . . I wanted to marry him . . ."

"Jerry, please!"

"Didn't you guess it?" Jerry asked, suddenly calmed.

Evelyn smiled. "You're a strange little idiot," she said tenderly. "If you really wanted to marry Alester Carstairs you wouldn't act as you do. But I hope you find out before it's too late that you're chasing a will-o'-the-wisp," she added gently.

Jerry misunderstood her. "But men like Alester do marry show girls," she said defensively.

"I didn't mean to say he wouldn't marry you," Evelyn explained. "I was thinking of how you've blindfolded yourself. It's true that I've never been really poor, Jerry, and we're not frightfully rich, but I do know that money will not bring you happiness."

"I don't expect to be happy the way most girls do," Jerry told her. "It's people who believe in love that are chasing will-o-the-wisps."

Evelyn did not let her see that her words had wounded. "Well," she said, "I hope for your sake that Alester stays good and mad at you."

Her hope, however, was not to be realized.

Alester, fighting a staggering headache and cursing himself for a fool, was thinking of his gift to Leontine and hoping that Jerry would not hear of it. And he remembered, too, that he owed Jerry a coat.

He got dressed and made his way to a shop where he'd been informed that he could find imports. Selecting several coats of a size that he thought would fit Jerry, he ordered them sent to her hotel, and with them he included a note.

Jerry and Evelyn had gone to the theater for afternoon rehearsal. To escape Leontine, Alester went there, too, about four. Jerry saw him sitting out front. He was hunched up in an attitude of dejection that won her sympathy, unguessing as she was of his well-deserved headache.

She was very much excited at that particular moment. She wondered if Alester would notice that she was rehearsing a new number.

When she had reached the theater, a half hour back, Mr. Hule had told her that she was to take the place of a girl who was ill. When Jerry came to the stage she discovered that she was replacing the girl whom the director had warned against catching cold. Apparently that sneeze of Jane's had been the cue for Jerry's first rise in the theater. The bit she had got was in direct support of the star, with two other girls and three men.

Consequently Jerry felt like embracing the world. Her rebellious mood of the morning was gone, also the fear that she had lost Alester. It had not troubled her long; she never could worry overmuch about his feeling

for her, and now that she had this good fortune to raise her spirits she felt like forgiving him everything simply because she was so happy.

At the end of the rehearsal she waved her hand to him before running down to the dressing-room. There she found the coats, which had been brought over from the hotel. The uniformed boy who delivered them gave her Alester's note and Jerry read it before opening the boxes. It was a plea for fairness and a chance to talk to her.

Jerry turned to Evelyn and held out the note. "What shall I do?" she asked.

"If Alester is responsible for the loss of your coat, as he says, I see no reason why you shouldn't let him replace it," Evelyn said after reading his message. "Let's see what he sent, anyway."

They opened the boxes and lifted the coats from the tissue paper wrappings. Jerry exclaimed in delight over one in particular. It was deeply collared with badger and when she put it on and felt the soft fur about her neck she lost her reluctance to let Alester give it to her.

After all, he had been unwilling to turn back and search for the coat she had lost. He preferred to buy a new one—and she owed him something for staying away from the party he had planned in her honor.

She looked long at herself in the mirror, and sent the other coats back to the shop. When she emerged from the stage door and found Alester waiting there for her she was wearing the one with badger.

Evelyn, suspecting that Alester would be at the stage door, had lingered behind on some pretext, saying she would take a cab later.

"Shall we hail a rolling chair and stop somewhere for tea?" Alester asked Jerry.

"Yes, I'd like to show my new coat," Jerry returned, smiling up at him from the flattering fur. "I like it very much, Alester."

"You look like an angel," Alester told her. Such words as angel and devil had been running in his mind all day. "Jerry, you can be a sweet kid when you want to," he added seriously.

"But the show's going to Boston and I just had to have a new coat," Jerry returned, to keep him from making too much of her capitulation. "Did you notice that I'm in Miss Laurel's support now?"

"To stay?" Alester asked. "I thought you might be taking Jane's place for rehearsal."

Jerry glanced at him sharply. "Is that the name of the girl who caught cold at your swimimng party?" she inquired.

"I didn't know she had caught cold," Alester said with no attempt at evasion. "Some of us left the beach early and carried on in my rooms, but I heard . . ." He stopped.

Jerry was glad he did not say what he had heard. She guessed that it was the same thing Mr. Hule had referred to. But whatever it was Alester had not been involved in it, she told herself with immeasurable relief.

The show stayed a week in Atlantic City and in that time Jerry went far toward realizing her ambition. Leontine had left on Tuesday night, furious at Alester for turning back his attentions to Jerry.

Jerry had not heard of the emerald bracelet, though the girl whose enmity she had incurred over dressing-room rights had told her that Alester gave Leontine a diamond bracelet.

She made it diamonds because she thought those stones would more readily inflame Jerry's jealousy. Had she

described the bracelet truthfully Jerry could not have helped believing her. As it was she put the information down as spiteful gossip. She saw the other girls sporting the expensive favors they had received at the party and assumed that Leontine had received a similar one.

She had no quarrel with Alester now. He had been behaving very well, and she had promised to drive with him to New York on Sunday. But shortly before the hour for the departure of the troupe Jerry was called into Mr. Weinertz's office to receive some important news.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

WHEN Jerry emerged from Mr. Weinertz's office she was all aglow with happy excitement. There had been a moment when she felt the nausea of failure rise within her, but Weinertz's next words had dispelled that sensation.

"We have decided to put Jane Ormay back in her place," he had said in the beginning of the interview. Jerry stared at him, wordless. "To give you a chance to go on with Jack Beals," he added with a beaming smile.

Jack Beals! The best hoofer in the show!

"You mean . . . just Mr. Beals and . . . me?" Jerry stammered, unable to believe that it could be so.

"That's right, Miss Ray. You and the boy. We've got to pep up that second act before we take the show back to New York. It can't hold 'em for the big idea in the third. Clever man, Harsell, very clever."

Jerry knew, of course, that he referred to what the entire company was still talking about, the way Harsell had led the audience to believe they were in for an evening of disappointment before springing that garden pool scene on them.

"But I am . . ." Jerry paused. She was about to say "inexperienced," when she thought of Evelyn

and what her friend would say to her if she talked herself out of a chance like this.

Mr. Weinertz, however, seemed to read her mind. "Sure, you'd flop alone," he said frankly, "but Jack can see you through—if you work hard enough. We'll start rehearsing you together in Boston tomorrow afternoon. By the way," he added as Jerry started to speak, "you're driving up to New York with Al aren't you?"

Jerry nodded, knowing he meant Alester.

"Well, see that you get to Boston in time for rehearsal," the producer went on soberly. "There will be some complaints about our putting you in ahead of girls who dance better than you do. If you start being temperamental we'll take you out."

Jerry flushed. She knew what the other girls would say. Up went her chin. "I'll make good," she declared warmly, "but I don't want to get by on anything except my ability."

Mr. Weinertz smiled. "Don't get excited," he purred. "Don't I know? When Hule gets through with you even Laurel herself won't have much on your stuff. Maybe I'd better tell you that Al hasn't had anything to do with your promotion," he continued more seriously. "We believe we can depend upon you, Miss Ray, and all that anybody says to the contrary, clean living counts for as much on the stage as anywhere else."

Jerry's fierceness disappeared. "I won't be late tomorrow," she said earnestly.

"Then tuck yourself in early tonight like a good little girl so you won't oversleep," Mr. Weinertz warned her and got up to walk to the door with her. Jerry was too excited to appreciate the attention.

She rushed back to her hotel to tell Evelyn the news and to hurry with her unfinished packing.

Evelyn was just as enthusiastic as Jerry. They had to talk it over for 10 minutes before they could think of anything else. Suddenly Evelyn looked at her watch.

"I've just time to make the train," she exclaimed, jumping off the bed to grab her hat.

"It can't be so late," Jerry said. "Alester hasn't come yet and he promised to drive you to the station."

"I'll take a cab," Evelyn returned, rushing to gather up her umbrella and handbag.

She was halfway out of the door when the telephone rang and Alester sent up word that he was waiting.

"I'd go with you," Jerry said, "but I've got to get packed in a hurry. We're leaving as soon as Alester comes back."

Evelyn stopped and looked at her with a suddenly grave expression. "I wish you were coming with me," she said. Then, excitedly: "Jerry, you won't miss the train in the morning?"

"If I do I'll get there even if I have to sprout wings and fly," Jerry laughed.

"You'd better depend upon the train," Evelyn called back as she hastened on to the elevator.

A bell boy got off it and Jerry showed him Evelyn's traveling bags. When the door closed behind him she busied herself in packing her own belongings.

Alester was back in a short while. Jerry was ready, looking very lovely in the new coat. Her spirits soared as she went down to the lobby.

"My things are upstairs," she said to Alester.

"We will get them after lunch," he told her.

Jerry regarded him in surprise. "After lunch?" she echoed. "Why, it's only 10:30 now. I don't think we ought to wait for lunch."

"But we must," Alester replied. "I took Miss Starr

to the station in a taxi. My car's in the garage for repairs. It won't be ready before three o'clock."

"Oh, Alester," Jerry wailed. "We won't get to New York before night."

"What of that?" he asked her.

Jerry told him about the new part she was to have in the show. He congratulated her and seemed genuinely pleased, but he saw no reason for any anxiety about getting to Boston on time.

"I'll see that you get there," he promised, "but I think we ought to do something to celebrate the occasion."

The suggestion made Jerry uneasy. "Oh please let's start as soon as we can," she said hastily. "I ought to be near the show."

"Now, see here," Alester replied with a touch of asperity. "I always have to argue with you, Jerry. Aren't you ever going to do as I like without making a fuss about it?"

"But Alester, you know . . . ."

"I know that you aren't treating me fairly," he interrupted hotly. "What harm can it do you to make our last evening together a pleasant one? You know I'm not going to see you again until your show comes back to New York. I've promised mother to go on her cruise to Nova Scotia."

"We could celebrate when you come back," Jerry began hopefully.

"Jerry," Alester broke in, "just this once let me have my way. I've planned a little dinner party in Philadelphia, wired a few friends yesterday. They're people I want you to meet—one of the girls is going on the cruise. This isn't a theatrical party or an affair like that one at Leontine's. Please don't disappoint me this time."

Jerry wished very much that she had taken the train

with Evelyn for she knew, before Alester had ceased his pleading, that she was not going to hold out against him. After all, it did seem a bit silly to insist upon getting home by 10 o'clock. And they would have to get dinner somewhere.

She asked how much longer it would take them to go by way of Philadelphia.

Alester said about two hours. "I can make wonderful time to Philly," he said, "and the roads to New York will be clearer at night. You will be home around one."

"All right," Jerry said, thinking that one o'clock was about her usual bedtime anyway. And she was in the habit of getting up early. Her short theatrical career hadn't yet accustomed her to late sleeping. Besides, there had been morning rehearsals to get her out of bed on most days.

They walked to the Boardwalk and took a chair car. After a half-hour of this form of promenading Alester suggested a ride in a speedboat.

Jerry had seen these boats, with seats like those in automobiles and the same kind of steering wheel. She thought it would be fascinating to go out in one.

Motion was always exhilarating to her, she said to Alester, and he promised to take her up in his plane when he got back from the cruise. His promise brought Dan Harvey to Jerry's mind.

"Teach me to steer," she begged suddenly. She did not want to think of Dan.

When they returned to shore, somewhat salt-sprayed and wind-blown, she had succeeded in crowding the unwelcome memory out of her mind.

She had been doing that all week, telling herself that what she felt for Dan was a transitory infatuation—something she mustn't encourage if she wanted to go on

growing fonder of Alester, as she seemed to be doing.

They lunched heartily at their leisure and at three they were off for Philadelphia.

Jerry could not down a feeling of guilt. When she promised Mr. Weinertz to make good there had been no thought in her mind of doing the least thing to jeopardize her future.

But Alester was in a very good mood. He was pleased with Jerry, pleased that she was to have a real chance with Mr. Weinertz, and elated that she had consented to go to Philadelphia with him.

Almost without being willing to admit it, he was building up something that might help him in case he ever seriously considered marrying her. She would make a good impression upon the people she was to meet tonight, he felt, and he wanted an ally at court where his mother reigned.

There had been a change in Jerry. Little crudities that would have made him unwilling to introduce her to certain of his friends had disappeared through association with Evelyn Starr. Jerry was acquiring a manner as well as manners.

"I hope you will like Miss Mortimer," he said as they neared the Quaker City. "She's one of the few girls mother doesn't consider among the lost."

Jerry wondered why he told her this. She could not help feeling that the remark was significant.

But she had something else more important to think about. What would she wear at dinner and where would she change?

Finally Alester himself settled the matter for her.

"We're going to have the Magnolia Rooms at The Kraal," he said and waited for the answering remark he was sure Jerry would make.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

"THE KRAAL!" Jerry said in precisely as Alester had anticipated. He chuckled.

"But that's a notorious place!" Jerry exclaimed, puzzled at the amusement he was showing.

"You're right; it is," Alester agreed. "But it's also the hottest fashion of the younger crowd at the moment. They've got a show that lifts you off your chair."

"I didn't think respectable people go there," Jerry ventured, wondering if there was any possible way of getting out of it.

"I knew you'd be shocked," Alester admitted. "You're so funny, but you needn't worry. The Magnolia Rooms are private and no one will see you."

"I was thinking of Miss Mortimer," Jerry replied. "If she's the kind of girl your mother likes I should think she would be too nice to go to The Kraal."

"Oh, Betty likes to go slumming," Alester told her.

"Well, I don't," Jerry said emphatically. "I know how the other half lives and I don't believe in commercializing misfortune to attract the curious."

"But the people who go to The Kraal aren't the victims of misfortune," Alester replied.

"They are, or they wouldn't be there. It's a misfortune not to know better."

Alester laughed. "Well, you just wait until you've suffered a little over the misfortune of having to eat the

fried chicken and honey waffles we're going to have there and you'll pray for more bad luck to bring you back."

"Can't we go some place else?" Jerry pleaded.

"On Sunday? Not a chance."

Jerry sighed.

"I suppose I don't need to change my dress to go to The Kraal," she said after a while.

Alester told her no.

Shortly they were driving through a high picket fence and up a rutted road to a group of bark-covered buildings that spread out from a central hall in the shape of a star.

Alester drove around them until he came to the entrance of one that bore the sign "Magnolia" over the door. Here he parked his car and led Jerry across a dirt-floored porch to a heavy, barred door.

It opened at his touch and Jerry found herself looking at a grisly-faced attendant who stood at attention with a spear in his hand—a spear, she saw, that had been dipped in red.

She shrank back from this sight and Alester put a hand on her arm. "It's a gruesome place," he warned her, "unless you keep in mind that it's all hokum to produce atmosphere."

"And spoil your appetite," Jerry added, shuddering.

Just then a burst of weird sounds came through a distant door that someone had opened. "It's like a jungle madhouse," Jerry thought.

Alester was leading the way toward a curtained opening at the end of the hall. "They lean hard on the wind instruments," he said.

"Wind instruments?" Jerry repeated, thinking of delicate flute-notes.

"Oboes and . . . those things," Alester replied, never having troubled to inform himself that the primitive notes like those of the trombone that came to his ear were produced by a sackbut and that the tuba, the ocarina, the hautboy, bassoon and bombardon, all added their tones to the wondrous syncopation that had brought fame to The Kraal.

Someone appeared at the opening. A jeweled hand moved the curtain aside. Jerry saw a flushed girl in a simple silk dress standing before her. She supposed it was Miss Mortimer but it occasioned her no surprise that a society girl should be gowned so inconspicuously. She had learned from Evelyn that smart women never overdressed.

"'Lo, Al . . . lester," the girl said in a singing voice as she came forward to meet Jerry.

"I've heard about you," she said. "Alester's impossibly boastful of his theatrical acquaintances, but we're all grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to know you too."

Jerry thought it was a very nice speech. She wished she felt it was sincere but the girl rattled it off like rote. Her mind seemed to be on something more important than meeting a show girl. She turned her head in the direction from which she had come and Jerry knew that she was listening.

The music broke abruptly. A girl laughed before it began again in a thin, nerve-torturing whine. Betty Mortimer bit her lip.

"Come on," she said quickly; "you're missing something."

A maid in a strip of printed cloth wound round her came to take Jerry's and Alester's wraps.

They followed Betty to the curtained doorway.

Alester held the bamboo fringe up for her to pass through but she hung back and let Jerry precede her.

"Addie's eating fire again," she said under her breath, but Jerry caught the words.

She had no time to ponder the meaning; before her was a scene of indescribable pandemonium.

At a table in the foreground sat a group of young men and women who were plainly of Alester's and Betty's sort. On the table was a large black pot and under it an artificial fire. The table was very low—made from rough boards laid on the floor. The guests squatted on mat seats.

But it was not the table or those about it that attracted Jerry's attention. At the end of the room—that end which connected with the central hall—wide doors, the entire width of the room, had been thrown open to afford a view of the entertainment.

Alester led Jerry to a seat and as she took it someone extinguished the lights. Only the glow from the potfire filled the room. Beyond, where the show was on, there was a dim, greenish light supposed to resemble moonlight filtering through jungle verdure.

The music had changed now. The air vibrated to tympani, the throb of tom-tom, the unvarying note of a beaten gong, the shrill clash of cymbals, the strange sound of musical bones.

Jerry's hands were clasped in unconscious tension as she leaned forward and watched the scene before her.

Dark figures emerged from a painted forest and gathered round a huge pot like the smaller one she had seen on the table near her. They joined others that had come before them and piled wood beneath the pot, from which issued a white smoke like steam.

Jerry saw, with a horror she could not shake off, two

grotesque creatures drag a girl, bound hand and foot, to the edge of the fire, where they threw her to the ground and left her to groan and shriek while they cast themselves into a veritable frenzy of leaping, whirling, bending, groveling gestures.

What happened at the end of the dance she never knew exactly, because she did not look, but from the comments of those around her she gathered that the girl had been sacrificed to the appetites of the cannibals—at least that she had been tossed into the huge pot.

Then the wide doors were closed, the lights went up and Jerry was introduced to the members of Alester's dinner party.

She heard a tall, thin girl with ropy hair and kohl-darkened eyes addressed as "Addie."

Jerry looked at her curiously, to see what a fire-eating girl was like. She saw at once that Addie—she had missed her last name—had eyes or ears for no one except a good-looking man whom she called "Cleve."

Addie clung to him in a desperate attempt to hold his attention—to absorb him, it seemed to Jerry, who felt ashamed for her.

The man gave an impression of trying to resist but of being fascinated against his will. He cast anxious glances about the table now and then and Jerry heard him admonish the girl to "stop it." Once she heard him say: "Marian may come in, Addie—you know she's trailing us."

Addie laughed—the same uncontrolled, mirthless sound that Jerry had noticed Betty listening to in the hall.

"That's getting on my nerves," someone remarked irritably. "It's been going on all afternoon."

Jerry looked around at the heightened color on the

faces of the men, the feverish light in the girls' eyes. It was easy to believe they had been in this horrid place for hours.

Betty sat down beside her and put Jerry's thoughts into words. "Nasty, isn't it?" she said unemotionally. "I don't know how they stand it. I came in just a few minutes before you arrived."

"It's . . . interesting," Jerry answered in loyalty to Alester.

"Addie always spoils things," Betty went on in tones of absolute boredom. But Jerry noticed that her eyes were fixed uneasily upon Addie and Cleve, and the flush had not left her smooth young cheeks.

"What does 'eating fire' mean?" Jerry asked before she was conscious that the words had formed in her mind. To her surprise Betty explained.

"Oh, it's just an expression we have for trouble seekers," she said indifferently. "Poachers, principally."

It was a vague explanation, but Jerry was further enlightened a few minutes later when a very attractive young woman with a wild-eyed young man in her wake entered the room.

She was greeted as "Marian" and she went about her business with no fuss and feathers—the business of removing Cleve. The wild-eyed young man tagged along, obviously upset over his role of escort to a raiding wife.

No one protested Cleve's departure. Jerry was sure she heard a sigh of relief from Betty, and immediately there was a general movement toward the dancing space. Alester led Jerry out and she saw with disgust that Addie was left with her head buried in her arms on the table, sobbing aloud.

"I suppose she thinks she's in love," she said to herself scornfully.

At the end of the dance she ventured to suggest that they ought to start for New York. Alester unexpectedly agreed. "There's an act I want you to see first," he told her. "I'll ask to have it put on now for us."

They walked toward the doors opening into the central hall. Alester rolled back one of them and left Jerry there while he went across the jungle floor to speak to the orchestra leader.

Halfway back she saw him pause suddenly and stand transfixed, his eyes on one of the tables that occupied the corners of the hall.

## CHAPTER XL

JERRY'S eyes followed Alester's. She saw nothing alarming—merely two men at a small table.

One of them was engaged in eating fried chicken. The other was returning Alester's stare. A crooked smile parted his lips and settled in one corner of his mouth. He said something in a low voice to his companion. The latter turned toward Alester and Jerry saw his features darken.

But Alester was coming toward her now, getting in her line of vision. He rolled the door closed in haste and grasped her by the arm with fingers that trembled. When they reached their table he seized a flask that had been laid upon it by one of the party.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

Alester did not answer. It was left for another man to enlighten Jerry. "Alester's seen the Red Terror," he laughed.

One of the girls gasped. "Do you mean that red-headed bootlegger they call Trigger Nolan?" she asked. "Isn't he terrible? He nearly slew the steward out at the club for cutting his stuff and claiming that he did it."

"What's he got against you, Alester?" someone else asked.

Alester sat back, his face farther from the light. "I

don't know him," he said shortly. Jerry knew he lied.

"Oh, I say, we're missing the show!" a male voice protested. "Open the doors."

His words were loud enough to be heard by a hovering waiter who accepted them as an order and proceeded to obey.

Jerry could see, across the hall, the two men whose presence had thrown Alester into a state of fear. The act he had requested completely failed to hold her attention. She was getting creepy with the unwholesome sounds and suggestive surroundings.

"Oh, do let us go," she implored when the doors were rolled together again. She saw that Alester had lifted the flask to his lips a second time.

"It's early," he returned briefly.

His willingness to depart had vanished, Jerry discovered as a half-hour went by and she urged in vain. He turned repeatedly to the flask. It began to worry her, doubly so, when the curt, fine edge of his cultured voice took on a furry overtone.

"Please, Alester," she begged. "I must get to New York. If you keep me here much longer I'll miss my train."

"There's plenty of time," he insisted doggedly. "We could leave at daylight and make the train."

"But I want to get some sleep," Jerry wailed. "You know you promised . . ."

"You're too old to believe in promises," Alester laughed mawkishly. "Don't be a killjoy, Jerry. I won't see you again for weeks. What's a little night out of a lifetime?"

Jerry turned away in despair. Betty had been watching, and listening. "I don't think you should urge him," she advised Jerry. "He isn't fit for night driving."

"He hasn't had much to drink," Jerry protested.

"No, but something has shaken him. Wait a while. You can run up to New York in two hours."

Jerry gave in. Time rolled very slowly over her head while those about her enjoyed themselves. They begged her to dance for them and because she felt that she'd go to pieces if she sat there waiting for Alester to take her away she consented.

They applauded her madly and Jerry thought with a catch in her throat of her jeopardized chance to win the approval of a theatrical audience. She made up her mind to appeal to one of Alester's friends to drive her to a railroad station if he refused any longer to leave.

She told him this, and that she'd find a telephone and call for a cab if no one there would help her.

"Wait a minute," Alester put her off. "Wait just one minute."

He lifted his hand and summoned a waiter. Jerry saw him pass a folded bill to the man and whisper something she could not hear. She sat silent, waiting to see if this had anything to do with her demand.

Soon the waiter was back. He said something to Alester in a low voice. Jerry caught his words, "Baltimore," and "a half hour ago."

Alester said: "Are you certain?"

"Yes sir," the man replied, not troubling to lower his voice now. Alester glanced uneasily at Jerry but her expression did not tell him that she had guessed at the import of the information he had received.

"He's afraid of Trigger Nolan," she said to herself. "That's why he wanted to wait until morning to start!"

"All right," Alester said to her; "we'll go."

Jerry took hurried farewells of the others in the party and in a few minutes Alester was bumping his car over

the ruts to the gate, without thought of the possibility of breaking his springs.

Jerry knew he had consented to go only because Trigger Nolan and his companion had gone in the other direction.

She did not give a thought to the sort of impression she had made upon Betty Mortimer. Only one idea dominated her now—to get to New York in time to catch the train for Boston.

She looked at the clock on the instrument dial and was relieved to know that there was plenty of time. She asked Alester not to drive so fast. His recklessness was breathtaking.

He did not slow up. Jerry gripped the side of the car with her right hand and said nothing more. If this was his way of showing his displeasure, let him show it!

She had not guessed correctly at the truth. Alester did not altogether trust the waiter who had told him that Trigger Nolan had taken the pike to Baltimore.

Jerry ceased to think of danger after a while. Large, soft raindrops splashing on the windshield threatened to slow their progress and gave her a new cause for worry.

"There's a garage just ahead," Alester said and the car leaped forward in response to added pressure on the accelerator. "We will stop there and put up the top."

They were getting pretty wet before the garage was reached. The rain was coming down faster now.

Alester suggested waiting until it ceased but Jerry was unwilling to lose any more time. "You can drive slow," she advised; "and it might rain all night."

But when they had gone a few miles farther she wished she had let Alester have his way. The rain was now coming down in torrents. The side curtains were keeping them dry but Alester's vision was cut off by the

rain beating against the windshield. He could not see 10 feet ahead of him.

They crawled along at 12 miles an hour. Jerry had to beg Alester to reduce his speed and she realized that Betty was right. Something was driving him to utter disregard of safety.

Jerry thought it strange that he could fear another man so much and think nothing of risking his life in an accident. She did not know that Alester was so obsessed with one fear as to render him unable to entertain another. And the real cause that made these two men hate each other did not occur to her, though she tried to guess.

They drove at a snail's pace for a stretch of 10 miles and then the rain lessened. Alester stepped on the gas again and soon they were making 40 miles along a gleaming, pool-dotted highway.

Suddenly one of the front wheels hit a deep rut. A few feet farther on Alester cursed under his breath. They were limping like a barefoot boy with a sore toe.

"I'll be damned if I'm going to stop in this rain," he said and kept on going. "There must be another garage along here somewhere."

For half a mile they bumped along with the flat tire being ruined under the ruthless treatment. Then Alester drove to the side of the road and stopped.

"We'll hail someone and send for a garage man," he said, reaching into his pockets for his cigarets. His arms were aching from the difficult steering. He'd had enough.

But no one passed. The rain was coming down again, harder than ever.

They sat in their isolated roadster another half hour and Jerry was barely suppressing her tears. She could

not make that train now. It meant that she'd never reach Boston in time for her rehearsal.

Finally Alester grew too restless to sit still any longer. He had not dared to make any tender advances to Jerry, knowing that she was furious and had good reason to be.

He got out and changed the tire. It was a wet, muddy job and when he climbed back into the car he was a sorry sight. He drove more carefully this time. There was no use in speeding.

"Don't worry," he said to Jerry after a long silence. "I'll see that Weinertz gives you another chance."

"He won't," Jerry said hopelessly, "not even for you."

Alester knew that she spoke the truth. Mr. Weinertz had told him many times what it meant to train a girl in a part only to have her dissipate her looks and energy in night clubs and fast living.

Jerry would hate him, he felt. He stole a sidewise glance at her. Jerry's eyes were filled with tears. Trouble scratched her mind with sharp claws. She might not lose her job, but she'd never have another chance with Mr. Weinertz.

"They will probably put Jane back in her place and send me to the chorus again," ran the burden of her thoughts.

All the joy that she had experienced this morning had now vanished. She was a dejected, beaten, little competitor for some of the good things in life.

She had made plans for spending the increased salary she was to receive—plans that hurt her to give up. But what hurt more than anything else was the necessity of revising the letter she had to write to her mother.

Suddenly Alester laughed.

"Why, Jerry," he exclaimed, "I know how you'll get to Boston!"

## CHAPTER XLI

JERRY turned to Alester with eager expectancy. His voice had carried unlimited assurance. Perhaps he really had thought of a way to get her to the theater on time.

"How?" she asked breathlessly.

"You'll fly," he said simply, "with Dan."

"Oh!" Jerry was so suddenly seized with excitement as to deprive her of further speech.

Alester stepped on the gas and they shot ahead as though he meant to fly in the roadster. Jerry saw him glance at his wristwatch. She looked at the clock on the dial.

"We'll make New York in time for breakfast before going on to Carmoor," he said, "and I'll telephone Dan to have the plane ready."

"Are you sure he will be there?" Jerry asked doubtfully.

"Yes." Alester did not add that Dan had once told him he'd make a flyer out of him before he quit . . . didn't want him to kill anyone before he learned how to manipulate his own ship.

Alester had known whom he meant when he said "anyone." He was sure Dan would be available.

"Now will you forgive me?" he said to Jerry, taking his eyes off the road for a few seconds to look at her.

"If you don't wreck us before we get to New York," she answered.

"I can't give you any greater proof of how much I regret getting you into this mess than by sending you off with Dan Harvey," Alester declared convincingly. "I'm sure you know what it means to me to do that, Jerry."

"You needn't be . . . jealous," Jerry said softly. "But why don't you pilot the ship yourself?"

"I would if I'd had some sleep," he told her.

Jerry considered the hardships they'd endured. She'd much rather had him fly her to Boston than Dan . . . she'd been dreaming too much lately of flying in the clouds with Dan in the silver airplane.

Jerry knew that love, no matter how ephemeral it might be, had an overwhelming power. She was afraid of it—afraid to have her dream come true. . . .

But she knew a man couldn't be in flying condition after driving a car for hundreds of miles and breaking that drive with a party such as the one they'd had at The Kraal. And she didn't want to tell Alester how she felt toward Dan. . . .

She said nothing more about the flight until they were in New York for breakfast. Alester had gone to the telephone booth to talk with Dan. He returned in a few minutes to tell her that Dan had refused to take the plane out.

Jerry's face blanched.

"Why?" she demanded.

"He says the storm isn't over; it would be unsafe."

"But I must go," Jerry cried. "It's raining only a little."

"The weather report says there is to be a thunder-storm over the New England states," Alester said truthfully. He did not feel justified in concealing the real situation from her.

"Oh, isn't there someone who's not afraid?" Jerry exclaimed in despair.

"I'm not afraid," Alester said, "and it ought to be my risk, but, Jerry, you know it's a very dangerous thing. . . ."

"If I don't go I won't have anything to make being safe worth a darn," Jerry returned plaintively; "but I can't ask you . . ."

"You don't need to ask me," Alester interjected. "I only wanted to impress you with the danger you'll be facing. For my part I like flying in bad weather. It gives you something to do."

Jerry forgot his abject fear of Trigger Nolan and looked at him with admiration. He certainly wasn't afraid to take chances! She couldn't have believed that he was braver than Dan . . .

In that moment Jerry softened greatly toward Alester . . . forgave him for everything she'd held against him . . . he was coming through for her . . . and Dan . . . a new thought struck her.

"Did you tell him that you wanted him to take me as his passenger?" she asked.

Alester nodded. "Of course," he said. "I explained to him just how necessary it is for you to get to Boston before two o'clock.

Jerry felt chilled. A warm little fire that had sprung up in her heart died down again at Alester's words.

They left the restaurant and headed toward the Queensboro Bridge and Carmoor. When they arrived at the Carstairs estate Alester drove straight to the hangar located on his father's private flying field.

He had called the chief mechanic and asked him to get the plane ready. The man had attempted to question

the wisdom of flying in the face of a storm, but Alester had cut him short by hanging up the receiver.

Jerry saw the graceful bird-like machine out on the runway with men busily engaged in inspecting it. Alester brought his car to a stop a short distance away and assisted Jerry to alight. He called to one of the men to take her suitcase and bag from the roadster and put them in the cockpit.

"There's a flying outfit in the hangar," he said to Jerry. "You'd best dash in and put it on. I'll get mine, too."

They ran into the big structure to escape the rain. Jerry was shown to a dressing room, where she found a flying suit. She quickly slipped it on over her dress. When she came out of the hangar Alester helped her into the second seat of the open cockpit and threw her coat to one of the men to place with her luggage.

Then, buttoning up his leather coat securely, he started to climb into the plane. The propellers were turned over with a roar that drowned out a voice that shouted to them frantically. Alester placed a foot on the step and prepared to lift himself over the side.

But he never got into the airplane. A hand seized him by the shoulder and jerked him to the ground. He lost his balance and was thrown spinning along the ground. When he succeeded in righting himself the plane was taxiing down the runway to take off in the wind.

"It was Harvey," one of the mechanics told him. Alester nodded and the man gave him a curious look before turning away to seek shelter from the rain.

If Alester had become enraged at Dan Harvey's insolence in taking the plane away from him in this fashion he failed to reveal it. In fact, he felt no

animosity toward his pilot for, in spite of his boast to Jerry that he was not afraid to make the trip and his usual disregard of danger, he had not relished the thought of a battle with the elements.

He was well satisfied with the turn of events. Jerry could not accuse him of cowardice and he knew she would be much safer with Dan in charge of the ship.

"I'm not in flying condition," he acknowledged, as he drove off to the garage. He had stopped to light a cigaret and his hand had trembled noticeably.

Jerry was very much surprised at the strange behavior of her pilot . . . he had not even turned to look at her. Why had he changed his mind? Maybe the weather had changed . . . had made flying safer. But Jerry immediately rejected this idea . . . Dan was not a coward. She'd known it, really.

There was only one explanation for his last-minute action that she could accept. He had become convinced that she and Alester were determined to make the trip, so he decided to take the risk himself.

"For my sake," Jerry told herself with an insight that opened the door of her heart for one little glimpse at a world which she would not enter.

They were getting altitude now. Jerry fearfully looked over the side of the airplane at the fast receding earth. Only a blur met her eyes, a rain-obscured vision of softly rolling hills and white-capped water.

The sensation of leaving terra firma was not as Jerry had expected it to be, due to the rain. Higher visibility would have sharpened her sense of standing still while the earth dropped away. No, not standing still; a queer feeling at the pit of her stomach assured her of motion, of height.

She leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. She

was not afraid. The queer feeling left her. When she opened her eyes again and looked at Dan's leather-clad shoulders she lost all apprehension. She would get to her destination.

Being with Dan always gave her such an encompassing feeling of security—except when she thought of the consequences of falling in love with him. It was a lovely feeling—one she never knew in Alester's presence.

"It's just as though he poured a sweet balm over my mind," Jerry had said to herself once in trying to define the effect of Dan's personality upon her. With Alester there was always a pricking consciousness of being at odds with him, of their trying to reach each other from entirely different mental planes.

And yet it was not Dan's ideals and ideas that she wanted to accept. It was Alester's. Jerry tried to stop thinking romantic thoughts about the man who at this moment held her life in his hands . . . she tried hard to keep her mind on the theater. Could she rehearse a new dance with any success when she hadn't slept a wink last night, a night crammed with excitement and dangers?

Her mind came back to her present surroundings with a jolt when a moment later the ship struck a bumpy area. Cold rain slapped her in the face and she hastily pulled down the goggles that she had thrust up on her helmet.

Dan continued to gain altitude and they got above the rain clouds. Jerry looked down at what seemed like a billowing ocean beneath her. The plane was now shooting away on a course that Jerry assumed would lead them straight to Boston.

Presently Dan looked back at her and smiled reassuringly. His was a real smile . . . a wide mouth and two rows of perfect teeth.

Jerry returned the smile.

"Game," he said to himself.

The next second the plane was accelerating its speed. Soon they were flying fast . . . 125 miles an hour, the instrument board revealed to Dan.

Jerry had no idea of the swiftness with which they were soaring through space. But Dan knew. In that backward glance he had seen a terrifying sight.

## CHAPTER XLII

A STREAK of lightning, jagged and blinding, had flashed in the wake of the plane. Dan knew that he had flown into the active storm area—that he had passed, just a few seconds before, the cloud that had launched the thunderbolt.

And he knew that the storm was ahead of him as well as to his rear. They were right in it. He set his lips grimly and prepared to climb higher. The altimeter indicated 2000 feet now, but to descend and try to make a landing was impossible. Dan was sure they were over the Atlantic Ocean and to fly inland to make a forced landing meant they would be carried with the storm, which was blowing in from the northeast.

Their only chance seemed to be to ride through it until they could get above the clouds again. Before them loomed a dense bank. Dan kept the nose of the plane upward. They shot through at one end and found themselves in the clear for a moment. Then the plane nosed into another thick cloud as it continued gaining altitude. Dan glanced at the altimeter. Three . . . , four . . . five!

All about them now the lightning cracked and thunderous echoes made an earsplitting din. The clouds were black—hanging lower than the white fleece that aviators love to sport with. Dan knew that he could get above them if . . .

Crack! That one was near!

Dan was flying blindly now—the heavens themselves his destination. He ought to get in the clear soon—he'd flown in clouds at 11,000. But they were not the Big Berthas of the air—the death-charged blacknesses that continued to roll up around them even as they mounted their futile little distance that to them was far, far above the earth.

Jerry was too frightened to move, but Dan was glad that he had disconnected the second control so that she could not take hold of it. He knew she must be in an agony of terror.

Who would not, with all hell bursting around them and no place to go—unless you wanted to fly right into it?

The rain had stopped, or rather they had left it behind them. These were lightning clouds that must fire their bolts before releasing their torrents of water. And Dan knew they'd been in the clear long enough to dry the wing fabric.

In the realization of their utter helplessness Jerry forgot everything else . . . her rehearsal . . . her mother . . .

Dan prayed for rain. It might be of no avail to them . . . probably it wouldn't be . . . if they were struck . . . he thought of the words he had spoken to Jerry . . . preferring to crash with her rather than let another man have her . . . it would be a miracle if that did not prove to be their fate.

For a fleeting space of time Dan sought to hold the ship level, trying to suppress his instinct to soar higher. He'd had some bitter moments with unbidden images that had come to him . . . Jerry in Alester's arms

. . . God, he'd like to crash to earth to escape living in a world in which such a thing as that could happen!

Now he was nosing upward again. Jerry's life was too precious to be destroyed at the whim of a fool who wished to escape his suffering, he told himself. But that pause in their climb . . . it seemed to have timed their arrival at a certain spot in the air with that of a dart of forked lightning that struck but a bare few feet away from the cockpit itself.

One wing was scorched. It began to smoke. Dan's hand on the control was frozen there. He could not open his eyes. He did not know about the wing that was smoldering. But his senses were clear. He struggled mightily to shake off the paralysis of shock. The plane was banking . . . he told himself it would go into a nose dive . . .

Jerry lay limp in her seat. She was spared this last horror. The dazzling, horrible flash so near had stunned her.

Dan's strong will forced obedience from his momentarily helpless body. His eyes came open and he saw the burning wing.

His imagination, always active and acutely alive in situations where Jerry was concerned, instantly conjured up a picture of her crushed body being devoured by hungry flames.

He believed they must have drifted over land—they hadn't been so very far at sea. His mind told him this in a subconscious effort, working mechanically under his conscious thoughts of Jerry. If they crashed it would not be to a watery grave . . .

In response to a tremendous effort of will his body muscles responded to the agonized call of his mind for

action. He had seen a way to save the girl he loved better than his own life!

In the distance to his left there lowered a menacing bank of sullen black clouds. Rain clouds beyond a doubt . . . If he could only reach them before the wing was destroyed . . .

He thanked Alester Carstairs at this moment for his mania for speed . . . the plane was swift . . . it shot away like a swallow straight toward the ugly blackness miles away. Jerry did not regain consciousness before they disappeared into its ebon depths. But the rain that washed into her face quickly revived her. She opened her eyes to find herself enveloped in a dim, dark, deluge of water.

"Dan!" . . . she sobbed aloud when she saw his shoulders rising above the back of his seat—just as she had seen them before that last terrible crash.

Jerry knew nothing of flying. But her ignorance was not so complete that she failed to realize that Dan was having trouble. Something must have happened to the motor, she thought . . . they were no longer flying smoothly or climbing steadily.

In a few more seconds they were out of the cloud. Jerry could now see the damaged wing. A part of it was gone and a charred, ragged edge outlined the portion that had been burned away.

But the terror that had gripped her earlier in the flight had now disappeared. They were out of that inferno of crackling lightning bolts and deafening thunder. And though she did not express herself in words, she took courage from her supreme confidence in Dan's skill at flying.

They were nosing down now. Oh, how glad she was of that! To get back to earth! . . .

She gave little thought to her failure to make good her word about getting to Boston on time. Her chance was gone. She knew it and uncomplainingly resigned herself to her ill fortune with gratitude to The Almighty for saving her life—and Dan's.

If tragedy had befallen him it would have been her fault . . . she had insisted upon the flight in the face of adverse weather conditions, she told herself.

Then she remembered that they hadn't landed yet. She looked over the side of the ship. They were dropping swiftly . . . the earth seemed to be coming up to meet them with a menacing threat to extinguish them. Jerry closed her eyes. She was seized with a new terror. She couldn't endure it any longer.

When she opened them Dan was lifting her out of the cockpit. She was too weak to struggle out of his arms . . . well, she didn't want to. He held her until some people who had witnessed their landing from a nearby farm house came running to their assistance.

"Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!"

It seemed to Jerry that Dan had repeated her name a thousand times . . . she didn't think it unmanly of him to let his voice shake, his hands tremble, either.

Jerry's story might have run a different course had they not been "rescued" so promptly. Two young people in love with each other would inevitably have come to a full understanding had they been left to themselves after such a harrowing experience.

But eager hands tore Jerry away from Dan before he'd got over the wonder of having her safe in his arms sufficiently to respond to the urge within him to kiss her. And just when he would have done it and made her his own a yelling group bore down upon them, and his chance was gone.

Jerry was completely bewildered with the events that followed. For no reason that she could see she had become a heroine. A resourceful press agent, perceiving an opportunity to capitalize upon her narrow escape, saw to that.

As soon as she could convince Dan that she was able to continue to their destination he had hired a farmer to drive them to the nearest railroad station, and though they arrived in Boston that afternoon, it was too late for Jerry to rehearse, even if she had been equal to it.

Mr. Hule received her icily when she came backstage. Evelyn was nearly distracted, but after a quick appraisal of Jerry's appearance she turned to Dan for an explanation. Then she insisted upon accompanying Jerry to Mr. Weinertz's office to plead for her.

Jerry took leave of Dan and he promised to be out front that night. Jerry declared she would be able to appear if Mr. Hule and Mr. Weinertz would permit her. Very fortunately for her the company's press representative was in conference with Mr. Weinertz when the girls were admitted to his office.

The producer, scowling fiercely, gave Jerry a chance to tell her story before reducing her to the ranks, with all the sarcasm at his command. She had not finished her recital when the purveyor of free space burst out with a whoop of joy.

"This show's been passing out for the lack of a good yarn to hand the newspaper boys," he declaimed with much earnestness. "And here's a natural, J. W.!"

Jake Weinertz grunted. "Of course it is," Evelyn exclaimed. "Why don't you rush a photographer to the plane and get some pictures before Mr. Carstairs takes it away?"

The press agent regarded her appraisingly. "Swell

idea," he said pleasantly; "but we've got a better one. We'll go out to a field, hire a ship and fake a good crash. Miss Ray can be snapped in the ruins."

"Oh, no," Jerry cried. "You mustn't let him do that, Mr. Weinertz. It might . . ." She stopped in confusion. She had been on the point of saying "hurt Mr. Harvey's reputation," when her better judgment came to her rescue. She held her words back. What the flying world thought of Dan wouldn't mean a thing to the press agent, she knew.

"Well?" Mr. Weinertz said, lifting his busy eyebrows.

## CHAPTER XLIII

"WHY," Jerry stammered; "you know . . . Alester's father . . . it would get him into trouble."

Again Mr. Weinertz grunted. "H'm," he said, "there's something in that. His old man has threatened to take his plane away from him if he has an avoidable accident. I guess you'd call this an avoidable accident—letting his ship go out in a storm."

"But he could fix that," the press agent declared. "He'd have his ship to show that it hadn't smashed."

"His father's friends would see your picture," Jerry pointed out. "And I don't think Alester would like you to use his name," she added, turning back to Mr. Weinertz.

He nodded. "I guess we'd better not make the boy sore, Sid," he said to his publicity man.

"But his name will put it across," the determined Sid protested.

"I think the true story is more thrilling than any you could invent," Evelyn stated, and Jerry threw her a grateful glance.

"It's their coming through safely that makes it so compelling," Evelyn went on. "Any man who can pilot an airplane through a storm and then bring it down safely with a crippled wing must be a wonderful pilot. I think he ought to be given proper credit."

Mr. Weinertz tapped the end of a gold pencil against his teeth.

The press agent sulked. "Why don't you write it up?" he asked, meaning to be sarcastic.

"I'd like to help you if you're really willing," Evelyn answered, unruffled.

The story got into the front pages of the morning newspapers. Jerry devoured it eagerly and knew that Evelyn had been as good as her word.

"I like that Dan Harvey," Evelyn had said to her.

Jerry was elated at the cleverness with which Evelyn had managed to see that Dan received his just share of praise in spite of the press agent's efforts to try to have Jerry played up.

Jerry did not know how she had accomplished this . . . she was well aware, however, that Evelyn could exert a rare charm when she wished.

Jerry had needed something like this to buoy her spirits. The fact that she couldn't go on in the show that night, not even in the chorus, had left a depressing influence upon her . . . and Dan hadn't communicated with her. She had waited a long time before retiring, as she had been instructed, to hear from him.

The next morning a note was delivered to her while she was at breakfast. It was from Dan. He'd written it just before leaving for the scene of the enforced landing. He was going to have the plane repaired so he could fly it back to Carmoor.

Jerry was hurt at his unceremonious departure. She did not suspect that he had realized he couldn't trust himself to refrain from discussing the subject she had forbidden him to bring up when in her presence.

But she soon forgot her pique. There were other things to monopolize her attention.

It thrilled her to know that she had been the cause for the much desired publicity that the press had showered upon the company. It thrilled her to know that perhaps a million people had become acquainted with her features in the papers this morning.

She had been photographed . . . a girl reporter had been sent to obtain an interview . . . she had been asked how it felt to flirt with death in the clouds . . . she made Evelyn help clip the stories from the newspapers . . . her mother would like to read the big news . . . it would please her friend, Myrtle, too.

What pleased her more than anything else, however, was Mr. Weinertz's capitulation. He gave her the part he had promised, but not without lecturing her on the advisability of attending rehearsals with punctuality.

"See that it doesn't happen again," he said finally. "Once is enough."

Jerry thought so, too.

She was not late any more. And she worked so conscientiously and uncomplainingly that she completely won Jack Beals' professional heart.

The number went over big before a critical Monday night audience. Jerry shared equally the honors with Beals . . . he carried her along and kept her from becoming frightened.

Jerry had learned enough of the traditions of the stage to realize what a magnanimous thing he was doing when he maneuvered for her to receive an even break in the applause.

By the time the show was ready to open in New York Jerry deserved all the plaudits that came her way. Her stage presence was that of a seasoned performer. She had perfect poise and a personality that immediately

won over her audience. She danced with an almost perfect rhythm, and she was one of the most beautiful girls on the stage.

Yet in spite of all these accomplishments and charms Jerry Ray lacked something. Perhaps it was talent. Some called it that. Others called it a spark—the thing that fires you to do greater things.

Mr. Weinertz, keen showman that he was, shook his head when he thought of her as a potential star. She just didn't have it, that was all. Bernhardts and Duses and Pavlowas aren't born every minute . . .

Jerry never knew that she had been passed upon for such a role. She was pleased over the hit she had made in Boston and was looking forward with eagerness to the opening night in New York.

Dan would be there. He couldn't stay away. Alester, too. She knew she did not care much whether he came or not. It was Dan . . . but she would not let herself weigh the matter.

The hour arrived when she stood in the wings of Weinertz's New York theater and stared across the stage at her dancing partner, waiting for her cue.

But she was strangely depressed. She had stolen out on the stage when the curtain was down and "peepholed" the audience. She failed to find the one she was looking for, though she saw Alester in a box with a group of friends.

Jerry recognized Betty Mortimer among them. Alester seemed to be in a very good mood. He had just been backstage to wish Jerry a "tremendous success." He meant it. He had been devoted to her since his return from the cruise in his father's yacht. She could not help but feel that he cared more for her than ever.

Alester knew it, too. "Maybe I'm a fool," he had said to himself, "but I think I'm going to marry her."

After the opening night in New York he was sure of it. During an entr'acte when he and Betty were left alone in his box he asked her what she thought about it.

"I think it's top stuff," she said with wholehearted directness.

"You like her, don't you?" Alester wanted to know.

"Indeed I do," Betty declared sincerely.

"I could depend upon you to sponsor her and see that my mother knows she's acceptable?"

"Why, Alester," Betty laughed, "you're talking as your father might have talked at your age. Don't you know it's the fashion to have a show girl in the family? Jerry won't need sponsoring. But she might need a guardian when you introduce her to our jaded young sensation hunters.

That night Alester proposed to Jerry. It was at a party that Mr. Weinertz gave in his rooftop apartment. He had personally invited Jerry.

There were two orchestras, one at either end of a spacious ballroom. You could dance without stopping if you liked, and Jerry was urged to do just that. Alester had brought his crowd along—two girls and a young man that Jerry had met at The Kraal. She danced with the young man and some friends of Mr. Weinertz because it was her nature to be obliging.

But when Alester led her out on the flagged terrace to a corner with a comfortable seat she was glad to have the opportunity to sink down on the linen cushions.

She hadn't the slightest inkling of what was coming . . . not even when Alester put an arm around her waist . . . Alester always applied this caressing touch if she'd let him.

Tonight Jerry let him, because she was despondent. Dan had remained away from the opening night—a night that was an event to her. He hadn't heard the audience applaud her. He didn't care whether she went over or not.

"Jerry . . ." Alester was slipping a ring over her finger. Jerry looked down and saw that it was the emerald she had given back to him.

"Let's go in and tell them we're engaged," Alester was saying.

Jerry was sure, afterward, that she must have looked a bit foolish when she turned her eyes to his face. It was such a commonplace proposal. Not even the star-sprinkled sky over their heads seemed to lend enchantment to the scene; not even the magic city that lay at their feet . . . not even the Blue Danube, the strains of which were floating out into the thin air.

Alester leaned down swiftly and kissed her. "Lovely," he said under his breath; "lovely girl of mine."

Jerry half put up her hands to press him away from her. Then they dropped. The blankness was leaving her now. Her head was filling with curiously comic thoughts.

It was funny, really . . . she had prayed and planned and worked to catch her millionaire . . . and now, now, when she had him she wanted to laugh in his face . . . to laugh at her own self, too, and tell him how preposterous, how utterly unthinkable it was.

She sighed, and dropped against him, dragging the radiant plumage of her spirit to the ground. If it had been true—if there were such moments as the poets sang of—such love as they described—it would have been sweet to know it, Jerry thought wistfully.

"Shall we tell them?" Alester urged, drawing back to look at her.

"Oh, no," Jerry cried, "not yet."

"But you're not going to refuse me, are you?" he asked. Jerry fancied that between the lines he had meant: "But you're not going to turn down a million dollars, are you?"

Why didn't she say yes and witness the stupid surprise replace his complacency?

But that would be madness. This moment was the turning point in her life. Before her lay a promised land of milk and honey. If she turned her face away there would be nothing but a desert. She wouldn't ever again be so nearly in love with anyone as she was with Dan Harvey, she told herself.

Only a man with Alester's wealth could lead her into the land of honey. What did it matter, without love, whether it were he or someone else, so long as it could never be Dan?

But the desert—the desert of poverty where love might have bloomed for her—looked very, very enchanting to Jerry as she turned to give her answer to the man who held open the doors of wealth to her.

## CHAPTER XLIV

"How can you want to marry me," Jerry said to Alester, "when you know I do not love you?"

She was insane, she told herself, to say such words to the only millionaire who had proposed to her. It was like taking a pot of gold and throwing it into the ocean. It did not seem to discourage him, however.

"Because I love you enough for both of us," Alester replied; "and I know that you aren't in love with anyone else."

"Because I told you I don't believe in love?" Jerry questioned uneasily.

"Yes."

"Would it make any difference if I did feel that way about another man?"

Alester did not reply immediately. "No, it wouldn't," he said finally; "because I want you, Jerry—in spite of a lot of things. I think I've known it since I first tried to kiss you and didn't get away with it. But if there is any such lucky devil I'd like to know it."

He paused to give Jerry a chance to say something. "Well . . . who is it?" he said after a moment of silence.

Jerry evaded an answer by walking to the parapet. Alester followed her and put his hands on her shoulders, turning her to face him.

"It's Dan Harvey," he said hoarsely.

Jerry pulled away from him—his fingers were hurting her. But she returned his boring gaze with a steady one.

"It might have been," she said quietly, "if I hadn't found out that love is only a mirage."

Alester laughed. "You don't know what you're talking about," he told her impatiently, "but I'm satisfied. When we go to the ends of the earth on our honeymoon you'll forget any lukewarm ideas you may have about Dan Harvey."

"Then . . . you still want to marry me?" Jerry asked, her young eyes candidly searching his face.

"Of course—more than ever. I wouldn't lose you, Jerry, for anything else in the world."

"But what . . . if afterward . . . I should find out that I had made a mistake?"

Alester's face darkened. "You would have to go on with it," he said flatly. "You are going to be mine forever."

His own words seemed to stir him to action. Jerry found herself caught to him again and held immovable while he took the kiss that belonged to the victor.

But later, when he wanted to announce their engagement, she opposed the idea.

"Why?" Alester asked.

"Oh, I don't know," Jerry said vaguely. "I guess all girls want to keep it a secret a little while."

"You aren't sure of yourself?" Alester pressed in a voice that betrayed his worry.

Life might have many surprises in store for him, but the most bewildering one always would be that occasioned by Jerry's procrastination.

Despite the fact that he feared her interest in Dan Harvey might divide her heart, he had held no doubt of her desire to marry well. It simply had not occurred

to him that she would hesitate to wed the greatest matrimonial catch of the season.

"It isn't that," Jerry said honestly. "I don't know what it is, unless it's just that I'd rather tell my mother first, or Myrtle and Evelyn."

Alester understood better than she that she was still struggling with her indecision. And her failure to respond to his caresses had warned him that he must consider her wishes.

He decided to let her have her way, but he told himself he must obtain her consent to an early marriage. "Before she really does fall in love with that bounder," he added, thinking of Dan Harvey.

"I know you've asked her," Betty Mortimer said to him before the party ended. "You look so glum. Which way did it go? Not that it matters. You'd look the same in either case."

"When you go to Florida with mother you can start warming her up to the idea of having a daughter-in-law," Alester replied.

"You mean a different daughter-in-law," Betty laughed. "You know she expected you to marry me."

"I told her up in Nova Scotia that I wouldn't marry you if the president of the United States commanded me," Alester returned unemotionally.

"That's what I told her, too," Betty admitted, and one would have thought they were discussing the weather, so casual were they.

"You might cajole the mater into announcing the engagement," Alester said, when he and Betty were threading their way back to their own particular group of friends.

It had occurred to him that Jerry would be too pleased

if his mother were willing to do that to want to keep their engagement secret. It seemed not at all strange to him that he should be devising ways and means of inducing a former shop girl to let the world know he had proposed to her.

A few weeks before he'd have got a hearty laugh out of it.

He did not care to tell Jerry what he hoped for from his mother and by morning, though he did not know it, he was farther away from his hope of having the news broadcast than he had been the night before. For Jerry had decided not to tell her mother.

She couldn't have explained her reasons for this decision because she did not examine them. The truth was that she hung back from taking irrevocable steps. Not that telling her mother of Alester's proposal would have made her irrevocably his, but it would make it harder to draw back. Jerry was not even aware that she wanted to draw back. But she was conscious that for some reason she did not want to announce the engagement.

In spite of Alester's pleadings she continued to keep it a secret, even from Evelyn. It was as though by doing so she held open a door for retreat.

Alester urged an early marriage, but Jerry begged for a few weeks more "in the theater," she said.

In reality she meant "of freedom," because she was telling herself that once she was Alester's bride she must never let herself think of Dan Harvey again—Dan Harvey would not be forgotten.

Poverty was not quite such a tribulation to her now, either. She resented the change, in a way. "Why couldn't someone have come along and said, 'Here's your

million,' while I was working at Fane's or when I wanted to send some little thing to mums?" she though discontentedly.

That day she had sent her mother a silk crepe dress; two weeks before she had mailed a big box containing a coat, a coat with a real fur collar. The letter that came in acknowledgment made her weep tears of happy sympathy and understanding.

And she had insisted that Alester accept money to repay Dan Harvey for the expense he had been put to in providing auto and railroad fares to Boston after their never-to-be-forgotten flight.

It had given her a feeling of delightful independence to be able to do this. "Why should it be allowed to cost him so much," she had said to Alester, "when he didn't want to go?"

"He was asked to go under my orders," Alester replied. "I'll take care of his expenses."

But he let Jerry give him her share to forward to Dan because he saw that it meant a great deal to her.

He guessed that she didn't want to be under obligation to his former flying instructor. Neither did he want her to, so he sent an equal amount to Dan at his home town where he was on a visit to his parents and bought orchids for her with Jerry's money—plus some of his own.

A week later Alester came to Jerry after the show with a very definite request that she announce their engagement. Jerry prepared to raise objections as usual, when Alester cut her short.

"I'm not going to wait any longer," he said resolutely. "Leontine is giving a party . . ."

"Leontine?" Jerry said in surprise.

"Yes," Alester went on levelly; "and I've accepted for you."

Jerry lifted her head in a flash of anger. "I won't accept," she said hotly. "I should think you would know that."

"Jerry!" Alester caught her hands and held them tightly. "Leontine is . . . an old friend of mine. I might as well tell you that I was pretty deeply infatuated with her until I met you. I can't deny that since I've not treated her . . . well, I . . . we . . . owe it to her."

"I can't see why."

"Well, that's the way I feel about it," Alester said, taking a different attitude. "And if you refuse she will think she's a lot more important to you than . . ."

"She's nothing at all to me."

Alester made an important gesture. "After we're married," he said, "she won't be, of course. You will move in an entirely different circle, Jerry, but . . . we're not married, you know," he added with an accent that Jerry sensed was a pointed reminder.

"You mean that Jerry Ray can do things that Jerry Carstairs mustn't?" she flared at him.

"Damn it," Alester exploded. "Can't you be sensible? You know what's what in this world as well as I do. But you have no legitimate reason for refusing to accept Leontine's invitation. It was not her fault that you met with an unpleasant occurrence at her place.

"She's very anxious to have you let her announce our engagement, and if you want to please me, Jerry, you will consent. I had intended asking my mother to do it, but she's left for Aikin."

"Couldn't we wait until she returns?"

Alester turned a suddenly hard expression upon her.

"Jerry," he said in an exceedingly steady tone, "are you playing with me? If you are," he went on, not a bit more gently, "I'm through."

"You know I'm not playing with you," Jerry replied; "but I think you ought to see that it would be embarrassing for me to be thrown with Leontine after what you've just told me."

"Nonsense," Alester said crisply. "But if you're just making excuses I'll know what to think. And one thing is certain—you're being very selfish."

"I'm not," Jerry cried. "If you care so much about it, I'll go, but . . ."

## CHAPTER XLV

JERRY'S sentence was not completed. She had been on the verge of telling Alester that she could not understand his desire to have his future wife associate with a woman like Leontine Lebaudy, when suddenly she remembered that she knew nothing against Leontine—except that she ran a roadhouse with an unsavory reputation.

If Alester felt that this indictment was not sufficient to place her outside the pale as far as his fiancée was concerned, she need not make an issue of it, Jerry told herself.

Besides, she had given in to Alester in very few things. What if she wanted him to go to a party at the home of some friend of hers? Certainly she would expect him to consider her wishes in the matter . . . she felt it only fair to consider his now.

"When is she giving her party?" she asked Alester abruptly.

"On Saturday, because I told her you won't stay up after two o'clock on any other night."

"All right," Jerry said listlessly, and not even the wave of relief that swept Alester and expressed itself by his showering her with kisses, made her glad that she had yielded.

Jerry lived in a sort of shell for the next few days. Nothing seemed to touch her, though her room at the

unpretentious hotel where she was living was filled with flowers and other tokens of Alester's affection.

She stood before a bowl of violets one morning and ran her fingers gently over the tiny purple blooms. "Once upon a time," she said softly, "I'd have thought it wonderful to have flowers sent to me each morning."

The words were followed by a sigh. "But I guess it's not so much having things as not having them that matters," she added as she turned away.

Jerry was not finding what contact she had made with wealth as continuously fascinating as she had thought it would be. But neither had she forgotten the sordid days of her girlhood. The result was that she surrendered to the belief that thrills and ecstasy were only words in the dictionary.

But if wealth could not lift you to heavenly heights, certainly poverty could set you down in a bottomless pit where worry and struggle were never-ending, she reflected. And a show girl could lose her job, could break her leg, or grow old. She would grow old.

"I can't save enough," Jerry told an inner voice that protested against the violation of her secret dream. "Actors can't save money—it just can't be done because you have to be hard-hearted to do it and you can't be hard-hearted and be a good actor."

She was still in a state of battling with herself when Saturday night arrived. She put on her bridesmaid dress with a heavy heart. One of the girls was out and Jerry was substituting.

There was something wrong with her tonight. The usual sparkle and vivacity were missing from her performance. Mr. Hule spoke to her about it when she came off stage.

Jerry tried hard to put some life into her dancing when she went on again. She was failing dismally when she chanced to look out into the audience and saw Dan Harvey. He was sitting on an end seat, center aisle, third row.

Jerry missed a step and Mr. Hule, in the wings, swore under his breath. But he wondered, before she came dancing off stage with the other girls, what had happened to her. Certainly she was animated enough now. And busy, too—sending a boy hurrying off with a whispered message.

Dan was leaving his seat for a smoke in the lobby when the boy reached him. He bent his head to take the message and then, much to the envy of a man in the second row who had overheard it, he started backstage, cursing himself every step of the way for being such a fool, a driveling fool, a perfect fool, a blankety blank fool—in fact all the kinds of fools there are.

Jerry was waiting for him in her bridesmaid costume that was not so chastely modest as to conceal the dimple in her shoulder or the round swell of her proudly carried bosom—a bosom that at the moment was rising and falling in a most revealing manner.

But Jerry was not conscious that she was thus betraying her inner emotion. She went to Dan with outstretched hands, unmindful of the meaning he could put upon her welcome.

Dan was not conceited, which was unfortunate. Otherwise he'd have known that she was overjoyed to see him.

"Where have you been?" she cried, and stood on the tips of her toes to bring her face nearer to a level with his.

"Home," he said sparingly.

"You never gave me a chance to thank you," Jerry reproached him; "even if I knew how."

Dan could have told her of one perfect way, but he didn't. Instead: "I'm glad you've had so much success," he said with unaffected sincerity.

"I missed you on the opening night," Jerry told him. "Oh, I've got to run and change my costume. You won't go away, will you? Please come back here again after my dance in the second act. I'll be through then. We can have a long talk."

Dan returned to his seat and when Jerry came out with Jack Beals he looked at her hungrily. Up there, with hundreds of eyes upon her, was Jerry, a bit of a girl who meant nothing more than a transient period of high-class theatrical entertainment to everyone in the audience—excepting Dan.

To Dan she was everything else . . . life itself  
 . . . a wife . . . a sweetheart . . . a  
 mother for his children . . . a little pal . . .

"Jerry, Jerry!" A bit of a girl . . . just a little  
 figure dancing to the tune of a singing heart . . .  
 making a man ache with agonized longing to take her in  
 his arms . . . take her away from the spotlight and  
 carry her off to his castle home in the mountain fast-  
 nesses. In reality it might be just a plain little house  
 with a built-in garage. But to Dan any house with  
 Jerry by his side—his Jerry—would be a castle.

"I'm a fool," he said again as he hurried backstage before Jerry had taken her last curtain. He saw her come off, laughing and bowing. "She must like applause," he said to himself, with intentional criticism.

Jerry saw Dan and danced over to him. "I'm so glad

to see you again," she said. "Let's find a place to sit down and talk."

She drew two chairs close together in a deserted room she had located. "Our greenroom," a wise-cracking chorus girl had once remarked. "You have to be green to use it."

They were trying hard to make casual conversation without touching upon the things that lay nearest their hearts, when Alester found them. He greeted Dan with a lack of friendliness.

"You ought to be dressing," he said to Jerry with a disapproving glance at her costume. She had been wearing a light robe but now it had fallen off her shoulders.

Jerry turned apologetically to Dan. "We're going out to a party," she said regretfully.

"To announce our engagement," Alester added abruptly.

Jerry winced when she saw how the blow hurt Dan. She knew that he was struggling to speak calmly as he wished her happiness. Her anger flared hot against Alester for his brutality. He had acknowledged on more than one occasion that he knew Dan loved her. Jerry knew that he had struck in jealousy.

Alester ignored the fiery look she turned upon him. He was in a black mood. He hadn't wished to take his bride-to-be to Leontine's party, but the latter had brought pressure to bear . . . threats had compelled him. Leontine had not hesitated to use the one weapon she knew would bring him. It was fear.

Alester had bent before her power. But it was only after he had capitulated that he began to try to analyze Leontine's motive—her real motive . . . the one

she had given him was only a flimsy pretext, he realized on second thought . . . why should she wish to "honor" Jerry?

Fear began to creep over him.

Dan was leaving . . . he had not congratulated Alester. Suddenly the latter strode up to him and put out his hand.

"Don't be in a hurry, old man," he said cordially, and carefully avoided looking at Jerry.

Dan hesitated uncertainly before taking the outstretched hand.

"Why not come along with us?" Alester went on, his voice taking on a growing eagerness. "We're three now; a friend of Jerry's is going—you can have the rumble seat."

"Oh, you're driving?" Dan said, but not as stupidly as it appeared. He wanted time to get his bearings. He knew Alester well enough to recognize the symptoms of diplomacy that generally developed when he wished to cover an ulterior purpose. Something was wrong with the man; his eyes were bloodshot and his lips twitched.

He looked inquiringly at Jerry. In his hesitation she read a desire to have her endorse Alester's invitation. She couldn't understand why he should want to torture himself, but she could not bear to send him away with that pain in his eyes. It would haunt her forever.

"Do come," she said softly, and put a hand on his arm.

"Do you really wish it?" Dan asked.

Jerry's lips framed the word yes.

Still Dan was undecided. He did not want to accept, yet he could not ignore a sense of impending trouble.

"Where is the party?" he asked. "You see I'm not dressed for anything formal. I don't believe I'd better crash in like this, Jerry."

Alester took him by the arm and attempted to lead him to the door without replying to Dan's question, but Jerry's words came too quick for him.

"We're going to The Rolling Stone Inn," she said.

Dan halted and turned to face her with the queerest expression she'd ever seen upon his countenance.

## CHAPTER XLVI

DAN was plainly dumbfounded by Jerry's words. She saw indecision, amazement and anger struggling to take control of him, though she understood only that he was disturbed.

He wheeled upon Alester and in a cutting voice asked him if it were true. "Are you taking Jerry to Leontine Lebaudy's place?" he demanded.

Alester did not answer him directly. He spoke to Jerry. "Please go and get dressed," he said. "Dan and I will wait for you in the car."

"Wait a minute," Dan spoke up as Jerry started to leave them. Then, to Alester: "Surely you aren't in earnest? You can't take the girl you're going to marry out there!"

Alester's eyes shifted furtively, then settled upon Dan's face with a challenging defiance. "Well, are you coming?" he asked gratingly.

Dan studied him at length before replying. He recognized a desperate bravado behind Alester's defiance—knew that Alester was not to be turned from his purpose—a purpose that held a menace.

"All right," he said tersely, "I'll go."

Jerry turned away without a word and hurried to the dressing room, where she slipped into her new evening gown. She had thrilled to the purchase of the lovely satin creation, but tonight she did not give it a thought.

Her makeup had been removed quickly, but now that she stood before her mirror, ready, except for the drop of perfume on her delicate eartips, she was reluctant to return to Dan and Alester.

"I'll wait here for Evelyn," she said to herself, and sat down to polish her nails.

Evelyn joined her shortly. "Don't sit in here," she cried when she saw Jerry. "Run along to Alester. I'll be out in two minutes."

"I'll help you," Jerry said, and began getting Evelyn's things ready. She handed her a folded towel to pin around her head and removed the top from the cold cream jar.

"You won't have to ride with Alester and me," she said as she pushed the stack of tissue cleansing towels within Evelyn's reach. "There's someone to share the rumble seat with you."

Evelyn's eyes had been closed, to permit the removal of the blue paint from their lids, but at a soft note in Jerry's voice she opened them to look at her.

"Who?" she said, and waited anxiously for the information.

"Dan."

"Oh," was all that Evelyn said to Jerry. But to herself she added, "I knew it!"

Once when Jerry had gone home with her to spend the night Evelyn had sought to draw her out in regard to her feeling for Alester but Jerry had shown no willingness to take her into her confidence.

Evelyn had, perforce, to drop the subject, though she was convinced that Jerry was unhappy. And she suspected that Dan Harvey was responsible . . .

She had consented to go to Leontine's party only because Jerry had entreated so earnestly that she could

not refuse. But she was not at all pleased that Jerry had accepted.

However, she hurried through her dressing as though she were speeded by pleasant anticipation. She knew that Alester had wanted Jerry to leave at the end of her act and that only Jerry's insistence upon having her along had kept him waiting.

Too, she wanted to see Dan and Jerry together. She was still ignorant that Jerry's engagement was to be announced at Leontine's party, and she hoped that she might find a way to make Jerry look searchingly into her own heart.

Nothing happened on the way to the inn to indicate to her the state of mind under which her three companions were laboring. There had been a hurried greeting between herself and Dan and then a hasty departure.

Upon their arrival they found the party in full flower. Guests were gathered at the tables. There was one, however, that was unoccupied. It was laden with costly blooms and sparkling glass.

Leontine welcomed them in the hall and when they had left their wraps in the dressing room she led them to the reserved table and told them to find their places.

Evelyn saw with a sinking heart that the favors and place cards were dolls dressed as brides and grooms, holding bits of cardboard. She leaned over to read what was written on one of them:

"Miss Lebaudy invites Miss Estelle Agnew to sit here and partake of the pre-nuptial feast she is giving in honor of Miss Jerry Ray and Mr. Alester Carstairs."

Evelyn straightened and looked at Jerry. But the latter was standing before a place where Leontine had laid a spray of orange blossoms. Her eyes were downcast, staring at the significant decoration.

Evelyn moved on in search of her own card. A waiter was placing an extra chair for Dan. Shortly Evelyn found herself beside him. She wondered how he felt over this surprise. But his face was a dead mask that revealed nothing.

Leontine had greeted him with no sign of displeasure at his unexpected arrival. Dan would not have minded had she protested. He was no longer sensitive over small matters.

Leontine made a supreme effort to bring a festive spirit to the occasion. Her guests immediately took up the cue, except those she was honoring and their friends.

Jerry was frightened. Full realization of the meaning of her promise to Alester seemed to come to her here. And marriage—marriage was no longer an indefinite thing, but a concrete fact that she was fully aware of at last.

She could not touch the food before her, and only the mineral water that she had requested could she force down her dry throat.

She dared not look at Dan or Evelyn lest they divine her terror. Once she spilled a few drops of water on her gown. Leontine witnessed the little accident and smiled.

Soon afterward a waiter appeared at Jerry's elbow with a note on a silver salver. She glanced at Alester and saw that he likewise was receiving a message.

She read the contents. Leontine wished her and Alester to go upstairs during the next dance and receive in

the privacy of her boudoir the gift she had prepared for them.

Down the table Leontine nodded to Jerry's interrogating glance. Alester, too, sent his hostess a questioning look . . . she smiled at him with serene mockery.

Dan and Evelyn had not been dancing, but when the music blared out again she jumped impulsively to her feet and exclaimed: "Let's dance! I can't sit still another instant!"

Her voice was raised almost to shrillness with suppressed hysteria. She knew now, beyond a question of doubt, that Jerry had got herself into a mess. The girl's face was white, and utterly devoid of its usual bright glow . . . it made Evelyn's heart ache to look at her.

"And she's such a quixotic little fool!" she thought she said to herself as Dan swung her into the rhythm of the dance. Actually she was speaking aloud, just barely escaping broken utterance.

Dan bent his head nearer but made no reply. "Oh, well," Evelyn thought, realizing that he had caught what she had said, "what's the difference?"

"What do you mean?" Dan asked as she remained silent.

She made no attempt to evade. "I mean that Jerry is just idiotic enough to stick to her word when she's already given it if she finds out that she's made a horrible mistake."

"She's had plenty of time to make up her mind," Dan returned dully. "I guess she knows what she's doing."

"I'm sure she didn't really know before tonight," Evelyn exclaimed. "Don't forget that she's just an untrained kid who longed for the moon. Alester is the

moon and the stars, too, in his world. You can't blame Jerry for being dazzled."

"I'll never forget anything about her," Dan replied miserably. "I happen to love her."

"Yes, I know," Evelyn said softly; but don't say 'happen.' It might sound sappy, but I do believe that real love is ordained. Some of us can't escape it."

"Or get over it," Dan replied. "I've tried to."

He looked across her shoulder at the table they had left and saw that Jerry was not there. His gaze swept over the room; he did not see her among the dancers.

Evelyn felt him lose step and glanced up to catch him frowning.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Jerry's not around," he said; "and I don't like it. To tell the truth, Miss Starr, I've had a queer feeling about Alester all evening. He's not himself."

"I've noticed it, too," Evelyn admitted. "Do you suppose we ought to look for them?"

"Let's take a turn around the grounds," Dan suggested, and they walked over to one of the half open French doors that looked upon the garden.

They did not go about stealthily, but they covered the grounds thoroughly before starting back to the inn. There had been an intermission and another dance since they had come out. They could see the dancers through the French doors, and Jerry and Alester had not returned to join them.

"Let's sit here just a moment," Evelyn said as they neared a bench. "I'm not entirely sure that we should be trying to intrude into other people's affairs."

Dan did not sit down beside her. Instead he leaned against a pedestal that upheld a small Bacchus and

touched a match to light a cigaret. As he flipped it away he chanced to raise his eyes upward.

Evelyn saw him stiffen. They were in the direct rays of an outside lamp . . . she could discern even the intentness of his gaze as he continued to stare at the upper part of the building.

She turned her head and looked in the same direction. All that met her eyes was a lighted window. That couldn't be all that Dan had seen, she thought, for he was now running toward the inn and calling back over his shoulder for her to follow him.

## CHAPTER XLVII

WHEN Jerry and Alester went upstairs Jerry was aware of something out of the ordinary in Leontine's request. All evening she had sensed a false note in Leontine's cordiality . . . the table decorations, too, had given her a feeling of uneasiness.

It was incongruous for Leontine to provide the sort of things that accompany an engagement announcement in a nice home, Jerry thought. It simply didn't ring true.

Leontine, watching through eyelids, had enjoyed her evident discomfiture. She felt that Jerry appreciated her mocking gesture.

Now, when she welcomed them in her private rooms, she was ready to tear away the veil of pretense that had hidden her real object in bringing Jerry to the inn.

"Come in," she said gaily, throwing open the door. "Sit down while I open the safe." She went over to a panel in the wall, slid it back and disclosed the face of a small steel safe.

Jerry and Alester remained standing while she turned the dial and clicked open the lock. Leontine reached into the safe and drew out a square box. She brought it over and handed it to Jerry.

"This is something that belongs to Alester's future wife," she said sweetly, "because I'm sure it was meant for her in the first place."

Alester was staring at the box in Jerry's hand like a person hypnotized.

She began opening it with nervous, fumbling fingers.

"Don't!" Alester cried sharply, and moved toward her with the intention of taking the box from her.

"Let her alone!" Leontine commanded sharply and grasped him by the arm.

Jerry lifted the cover of the box. Before her, on the satin lining, lay a jade and emerald bracelet to match the ring on her finger . . .

All three were so absorbed with their own reactions to the sight that none heard the soft turning of a door handle close by.

They were standing not far from the hall door. Leontine's boudoir was a large room. They could not be seen by anyone in the garden below, but when the door that opened into the adjoining room was slowly pushed open and a man with flaming red hair stepped into their presence he was in the direct line of vision of a young man who leaned against a pedestal and touched a match to a cigaret.

But between the time he was observed entering the boudoir and Dan reaching the door, much had happened.

"Why, Alester," Jerry exclaimed, "this must be the bracelet you promised me!"

Leontine laughed. "I dare say it is," she remarked lightly, "but you see he gave it to me instead. That night in Atlantic City when you were too foolish to come to his party and get it for yourself."

Jerry looked mutely at Alester. "I was drunk," he said guiltily.

Leontine's laughter came again, shrill and mirthless. "Oh, no you weren't," she cried. "Don't let him start deceiving you so early, Jerry."

Suddenly Jerry thrust the box toward her. "I don't want it," she faltered.

"Of course you do," Leontine urged. "It's my gift to you for taking the only man I've ever loved away from me. Oh, I knew it had to come some day," she went on recklessly, "but I don't intend that the girl who gets him shall think him any better than he is."

"Leontine," Alester began pleadingly, "don't be a fool."

"A fool!" she echoed. "Could I be a greater fool than I have been? Wasn't it foolish to love you? But you didn't object to that kind of foolishness, did you? Especially in Atlantic City? You wanted my love then, didn't you? and you thought you could play for it with a bauble! Bah!"

She struck out and flung the box from Jerry's hand with a fierce gesture. "That's the sort of love that Trigger gets . . . Oh, God!"

She stood like a graven image and the hot words died upon her paling lips.

Jerry turned in horror to see what awful sight had caught Leontine's attention. Perhaps she would not have recognized the red-headed man she had seen at The Kraal had not Trigger's name on Leontine's lips brought him to her mind.

He came toward them in a crouching, cat-like posture, his feet padding softly on the thick velvet carpet. On his face an evil, terrifying smile played fitfully. One hand was in his coat pocket. The other was spread out at his side as though he used it to balance himself.

Leontine screamed suddenly, and the sound filled Jerry with a sickening fear that she was never to forget entirely.

The effort of expressing her terror vocally seemed to unlock the iron grip that held Leontine inactive. She

darted across the room with an amazing swiftness and stopped before a desk. Jerry saw her pull out a drawer and thrust her hand into it.

Then, as though she were tired and desired to rest, she dropped into the beautiful chair where she was accustomed to sit and write letters on her fine stationery.

Jerry thought she had fainted and started to her aid. Alester grabbed her by the arm and before Jerry could free herself she saw Leontine crumple up and slide noiselessly to the floor.

Jerry screamed and flew over to kneel beside her. At her back a snarling murderer turned upon a white-faced young man and made him beg for his life.

Leontine was lying face downward. Jerry turned her cheek until it rested on one of the dead girl's arms. Great, strangling sobs tore out of her throat when her eyes fell upon Leontine's back. She swayed with faintness at the sight of the golden skin so much like the petal of a yellow rose reddened with a blood stain.

"Oh, Alester," she moaned, and turned away. She heard someone pounding on the door, but she could not answer or go to open it.

She stood as still as Leontine had stood when she saw her deceived lover in the room, but in her heart was not fear, only a nauseating enlightenment that completely unnerved her.

Alester was on his knees, cringing before Trigger Nolan and pleading to be spared his miserable life. Jerry drank deep of bitter disillusionment as she heard this man she had promised to marry babbling his blame of the girl who lay with broken wings in her gorgeous nest.

His craven cowardice sickened even the relentless man who threatened him.

"You white-livered, dirty cur," he cried, and kicked

Alester viciously in the ribs. Alester screeched and doubled up in a heap. Trigger spat out a name with an ugly meaning unknown to Jerry and swung back his foot to smash at Alester's face.

Undoubtedly he would have killed him but for Alester's precaution in bringing Dan to the party. As it was the second kick registered along the side of Alester's dodging head and left him half dazed. But Trigger got no farther in his murderous assault.

Dan had succeeded in bursting in the door and saw in a glance that Jerry was in no immediate danger. Then he rushed to Alester's assistance as Trigger turned upon him and aimed his silenced gun.

Dan threw himself at his feet in a flying tackle and brought him down in a cursing, hurtling sprawl.

Jerry wrung her hands in an anguish of fright while they struggled for supremacy. But it was over quickly. Dan succeeded in freeing an arm sufficiently to draw it back and plant a stinging blow on the point of Trigger's chin. The man wilted in his hold and sank helplessly to the floor.

Dan brought his head up with a brief command to Jerry to find something to bind Trigger's hands. He was afraid to leave him lest he revive and renew the struggle.

Jerry looked about the room in vain. Then she ran into Leontine's bedroom and pulled open the drawers of a dresser until she found one that contained stockings. She grabbed up an armful of them and hurried back to Dan.

Together they bound Trigger securely with hose of web-like fineness.

"Do you think it will hold him?" Jerry whispered, fearful that a loud tone would bring the man to consciousness.

Neither she nor Dan was thinking of Alester, who sat up and leaned against the legs of a chair while he rubbed an investigating hand along the side of his head. He brought it away with blood on his fingers.

Jerry's words came to him with menacing significance. He waited for Dan's reply, but none came, and he saw the man who had saved him suddenly wince as with sharp pain and place a hand on his shoulder. Alester completely lost his head then.

"Oh, you're wounded!" Jerry cried, and put an arm around Dan's shoulder.

"Not bad," Dan said, but his lips twisted in pain and he slumped quietly over, a dead weight in Jerry's arms.

She was frantically trying to revive him when Evelyn found her.

Dan had rushed so swiftly through the lower hall and disappeared so rapidly up the stairs that Evelyn had not been able to keep him in sight.

She did not know where he was going, except to an upper room. She had taken the rear stairs, which were nearer the back entrance, thinking she would save time. But when she reached the second floor she found herself in a wing of the building, and not until she heard Jerry scream did she know which way to go.

Then as she started to run toward Leontine's room, she was stopped by three roisterers who caught her and held her until she could fight herself free of them. They seemed imbued with an idea that she would be a nice addition to their private party and made her fight hard for her release.

When finally she reached the scene of the tragedy she found Jerry beside herself with grief and a fear-crazed man at the telephone imploring the operator to give him a number.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

EVELYN lifted Jerry away from Dan and led her to the chaise longue where she had reposed for a short while on the occasion of her first visit to the Rolling Stone Inn.

Then she looked around for a bell to summon help and when she found one she rang it repeatedly. After that she went to the bathroom and brought a glass of water to hold to Dan's lips.

When he revived Alester was still at the telephone and Jerry was a sobbing, distraught heap on the silk pillows. Dan struggled to sit up on the floor and fell back weakly. His eyes closed again and his face gradually became colorless.

Evelyn herself was beginning to succumb to the horror of the situation when help arrived. She had found a moment to perform one merciful act that nearly shattered her nerve to control. Over the dead girl she had placed a sheet that she tore from Leontine's bed.

And when the curious followed the servants to the room the tragic sight of a butterfly who had winged home on a murderer's bullet was denied them.

No one seemed to pay any attention to Alester, who sat before the telephone and stared like a madman at the others in the room. He had got the number he'd asked for but now that he had time to realize what he had done he was terrified.

While gentle hands lifted Dan and carried him into

the bedroom to place him on the bed Alester crept out into the hall and down to the rear entrance. No one tried to stop him and presently he was burning up the road in his black roadster on the way to Carmoor. He needed his father's protection, which he begged for in the latter's room until morning had long replaced night.

Carstairs senior promised at last to help him, but in the father's voice was all the dreary hopelessness of one who knew that in the magic clay of man he had spawned the soul of a jellyfish.

They were at breakfast in the sunny, tile-floored, cheerfully furnished breakfast room from which they could look down to the Sound and out beyond to the spot where the Carstairs yacht rode at anchor in majestic idleness, when the butler came to inform them that a police inspector was waiting to see them.

"Show him into the library," Mr. Carstairs directed. Then, to Alester, "Remain here until I send for you."

But he did not send for the shaken young man who paced the room in a fever of fear and dread. In twenty minutes he was back and Alester turned to him as a drowning man would clutch at a straw.

"They tell me you called the police to the inn yourself," his father said to him.

Alester nodded.

"I don't suppose you knew what you were doing but it was a fortunate thing, because your name couldn't have been kept out of the affair, I'm afraid, even if you'd tried to hush it up."

"What are they going to do? Do they want me?" Alester cried in torment.

"Not as a prisoner," his father answered contemptuously. "But I've given my word that I will be responsible for your apperaance wherever it is required."

Alester sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"I trust you not to leave the grounds," the elder man went on, with an edge of scorn in his voice. "In fact, I shall see that you will be immediately apprehended if you go outside the gates."

Alester bowed lower before his stern decision.

But, bow as low as he might, he could not be lower in spirit and hope than a grief-stricken girl who hovered over the hospital cot of a wounded man and prayed for his recovery.

If Dan should die. . . . If he left her without one farewell word . . . even a look. . . .

"You must go away, Miss Ray," a nurse told her.

Jerry pleaded to stay. "Just until his mother comes. He can't be left alone—oh please don't drive me away from him . . . he might call for me . . . he might want me. . . ."

Outside the building the newsboys were ignoring the street warning: "SILENCE—HOSPITAL," and calling the headlines relating to the tragedy at the Rolling Stone Inn. "Millionaire's son—bootlegger—show girl." . . . Jerry did not hear it.

Neither did she know that Evelyn guarded her from interviewers and kept her from reading the papers.

When night came she was bundled into Mr. Weinertz's motor car and taken to her hotel on the orders of a physician. There Myrtle came to her and sat with her until morning . . . inarticulate Myrtle who said, "Gee, kid, don't cry so hard," over and over.

Evelyn was back again at seven o'clock. She made Myrtle take a hot bath in Jerry's tub, eat a bite of breakfast and lie down to rest until time for her to go to work.

Jerry could no longer be restrained from returning to the hospital and when she got there she found Dan's mother at his bedside.

Jerry's mental picture of Dan's mother had been of a woman who might be either fat and contented or shrunk and tired like her own mother—at least she had taken it for granted that Mrs. Harvey would be akin to all mothers she had known—except, perhaps, Mrs. Starr. Jerry knew that Evelyn's mother had been born into decadent aristocracy.

Dan had seemed so natural in his manners, so simple and unaffected, that Jerry had never imagined he belonged to a socially well-placed family.

Her experience with prominent people had been only with those who moved on the uppermost crust of the social world. She did not know much of people who lived in unostentatious comfort, with well-filled libraries and exquisitely fine linen, coin silver for heirlooms, and a taste for chamber music and art exhibits.

She had always thought of public spirited clubwomen as meddling busybodies. Of course she did not know that Mrs. Harvey was a leading clubwoman, else she might at least have been prepared to meet a woman of efficiency.

She expected, when they told her Dan's mother was there, to find a weeping, moaning woman at his bedside. Instead she saw a slender, quietly dressed lady—the word came to her unconsciously—sitting with one of Dan's hands in hers.

Mrs. Harvey turned as the nurse came up to her and whispered Jerry's name. Then she placed her son's hand tenderly on the coverlet and rose to meet this girl her son had talked about.

They looked at each other silently for a few seconds;

then Jerry found her hands clasped in rose-soft palms and heard a beautiful voice saying: "My son wanted to marry you. You love him, don't you?"

Jerry answered in a choked, broken effort: "Will he live?"

Dan's mother put an arm around her. "If God is willing," she said in a whisper. "Let us ask Him. I want my boy to live now more than ever. I've never had a daughter, Jerry."

Together they knelt by Dan's side and sent up their piteous pleas. Jerry prayed blindly, without words—the mother asked of an Almighty Father the earthly existence for yet a little longer of one of His own children—that he might not be taken away from her while his manhood flowered at its perfection.

Then they were sent away. Jerry begged with anguished eyes to remain; these she could not control although she muted her lips, pinched them in to hold back the words that were wrung from her heart.

"No." The nurse shook her head with a gentle firmness. She did not tell them the crisis was approaching. "Dr. Claver is ready to dress the wound," she said simply and Jerry submitted to being led away.

A half-hour later they were allowed to return. The doctor was with Dan.

"How is he?" the mother appealed.

"Stay with him," the medical man replied. "He may return to consciousness at any moment."

"And . . ." the tremulous words hung in the air like a sword of doom.

"You will have him back . . . or you must . . . say goodbye to him," the doctor told them quietly.

Jerry sank into Mrs. Harvey's arms. The doctor helped to seat her in a chair by the window.

"I will sit by my boy," Mrs. Harvey said in a voice that sounded like a silver wire drawn to the breaking point and played upon by skeleton fingers.

An hour went by like eternity. Mrs. Harvey's eyes never left her son's face. Jerry fought to keep herself away . . . it was his mother's right to hear his first—and perhaps his last—words, she told herself.

Her head was buried in her arms when she heard her name called. And there was Dan looking at her, and his mother smiling the smile that mothers have smiled through the ages—the wistful smile that accompanies the delivery of their own into the hands of the mother-wife who succeeds them.

Jerry flew to the bed.

In a moment the doctor placed a hand on her shoulder. Dan let her go at the physician's command.

But later she was allowed to be with him for half an hour.

"What is that on your finger?" Dan asked, staring at her left hand.

Jerry giggled—yes, it must be said—she giggled, but oh so happily.

"It's your mother's wedding ring," she said. "She gave it to me downstairs when . . . when we didn't know if you would live to give me another one."

"Plain gold," Dan said softly. "No platinum or diamonds, Jerry, darling."

Jerry closed her eyes in sharp recollection of a scene she must live with all her life—a beautiful golden girl on a velvet carpet—a still, lifeless girl to whom jewels mattered not. She seemed to see a price tag on the girl's rich surroundings. "Love."

For love, she knew, was what she herself had been

willing to sacrifice to live as Leontine had lived—in luxury.

“Maybe your mother,” she said softly, “will let us keep this one. I’m sure it has made her happy.”

Dan laughed. “Jerry, you’re hit! My name is not Cupid but at least it’s Dan.”

THE END

## *There's More to Follow!*

More stories of the sort you like; more, probably, by the author of this one; more than 500 titles all told by writers of world-wide reputation, in the Authors' Alphabetical List which you will find on the *reverse side* of the wrapper of this book. Look it over before you lay it aside. There are books here you are sure to want—some, possibly, that you have *always* wanted.

It is a *selected* list; every book in it has achieved a certain measure of *success*.

The Grosset & Dunlap list is not only the greatest Index of Good Fiction available, it represents in addition a generally accepted Standard of Value. It will pay you to

## *Look on the Other Side of the Wrapper!*

*In case the wrapper is lost write to the publishers for a complete catalog*

---

# MARGARET PEDLER'S NOVELS

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

## TO-MORROW'S TANGLE

---

The game of love is fraught with danger. To win in the finest sense, it must be played fairly.

## RED ASHES

---

A gripping story of a doctor who failed in a crucial operation---and had only himself to blame. Could the woman he loved forgive him?

## THE BARBARIAN LOVER

---

A love story based on the creed that the only important things between birth and death are the courage to face life and the love to sweeten it.

## THE MOON OUT OF REACH

---

Nan Davenant's problem is one that many a girl has faced---her own happiness or her father's bond.

## THE HOUSE OF DREAMS-COME-TRUE

---

How a man and a woman fulfilled a Gypsy's strange prophecy.

## THE HERMIT OF FAR END

---

How love made its way into a walled-in house and a walled-in heart.

## THE LAMP OF FATE

---

The story of a woman who tried to take all and give nothing.

## THE SPLENDID FOLLY

---

Do you believe that husbands and wives should have no secrets from each other?

## THE VISION OF DESIRE

---

An absorbing romance written with all that sense of feminine tenderness that has given the novels of Margaret Pedler their universal appeal.

## WAVES OF DESTINY

---

Each of these stories has the sharp impact of an emotional crisis---the compressed quality of one of Margaret Pedler's widely popular novels.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

---

---

# THE NOVELS OF TEMPLE BAILEY

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

## THE BLUE WINDOW

The heroine, Hildegard, finds herself transplanted from the middle western farm to the gay social whirl of the East. She is almost swept off her feet, but in the end she proves true blue.

## PEACOCK FEATHERS

The eternal conflict between wealth and love. Jerry, the idealist who is poor, loves Mimi, a beautiful, spoiled society girl.

## THE DIM LANTERN

The romance of little Jane Barnes who is loved by two men.

## THE GAY COCKADE

Unusual short stories where Miss Bailey shows her keen knowledge of character and environment, and how romance comes to different people.

## THE TRUMPETER SWAN

Randy Paine comes back from France to the monotony of every-day affairs. But the girl he loves shows him the beauty in the common place.

## THE TIN SOLDIER

A man who wishes to serve his country, but is bound by a tie he cannot in honor break—that's Derry. A girl who loves him, shares his humiliation and helps him to win—that's Jean. Their love is the story.

## MISTRESS ANNE

A girl in Maryland teaches school, and believes that work is worthy service. Two men come to the little community; one is weak, the other strong, and both need Anne.

## CONTRARY MARY

An old-fashioned love story that is nevertheless modern.

## GLORY OF YOUTH

A novel that deals with a question, old and yet ever new—how far should an engagement of marriage bind two persons who discover they no longer love.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

---

---

---

# RUBY M. AYRES' NOVELS

---

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

---

THE MAN THE WOMEN LOVED

THE LITTL'ST LOVER

CANDLE LIGHT

THE MAN WITHOUT A HEART

THE ROMANCE OF A ROGUE

RICHARD CHATTERTON

A BACHELOR HUSBAND

THE SCAR

THE MARRIAGE OF BARRY WICKLOW

THE UPHILL ROAD

WINDS OF THE WORLD

THE SECOND HONEYMOON

THE PHANTOM LOVER

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

---

---

---

# THE NOVELS OF VIDA HURST

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

Vida Hurst is recognized as one of the foremost authors of "Romances of the Modern Girl." All of her stories have been widely serialized in newspapers throughout the country and her novels are always in great demand. There are five stories now available in the Grosset & Dunlap edition.

## BIG GAME

The story of a girl who thought love more powerful than society—more important even than marriage. A tremendous and gripping romance of a girl who dared.

## DIANA

After a hastened marriage between Diana and Arthur Vane, years older and a successful lawyer, Diana soon runs away to New York where a terrible experience brings her to her senses.

## THE GREATER LOVE

A story in which Nancy Gage found after trials and tribulations that the superficialities of pride are only surface deep. But that true love is everlasting.

## SONIA

Sonia Marsh goes to San Francisco to seek a new life and a happy one but she finds everything is not smooth sailing. After many harrowing experiences she finally marries the man she loves.

## SEQUEL TO SONIA

It continues the life story of Sonia Marsh, who left her small town to go to the city, where she falls in love with a Doctor and marries him.

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*, NEW YORK

---





## ANNOUNCEMENT

ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS WRAPPER WILL BE FOUND—ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY BY AUTHOR—A LIST OF THE BEST BOOKS OF FICTION ISSUED BY ALL THE PROMINENT PUBLISHING HOUSES IN THE UNITED STATES DURING RECENT YEARS.

IT CONTAINS PRACTICALLY ALL THE "BEST SELLERS" AND ONLY BOOKS THAT HAVE MADE GOOD FIND THEIR WAY INTO THIS LIST. CONSEQUENTLY YOU ARE ALWAYS SURE OF SECURING A WORTH-WHILE NOVEL WHEN YOU SELECT FROM THIS CATALOG.

THESE BOOKS ARE ISSUED IN POPULAR PRICED EDITIONS, SIMILAR TO THIS VOLUME, AND WILL BE FOUND FOR SALE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
Publishers : New York



**R**OMANCE is within the reach of every modern girl. Sparkling, gay, wise, she is reaching out for experience that new freedom offers. These are novels written with warm understanding of the girl who must earn her own living and face real temptations. Romances come swiftly and often with dramatic results to the girl who dares to be independent.

### THE NOVELS OF BEATRICE BURTON

Written with keen insight into the heart of the modern girl, these romances caused a tremendous sensation when they first appeared in the newspaper serials.

THE PETTER  
LOVE BOUND  
FOOTLOOSE

THE FLAPPER WIFE

MONEY LOVE  
SALLY'S SHOULDERS  
THE HOLLYWOOD GIRL  
HONEY LOU OR THE LOVE  
- WRECKER



### THE NOVELS OF ELENORE MEHERIN

The charm of "Chickie" and Elenore Meherin's other heroines was first brought to the fore in the newspaper serials. Now these novels are in the handsome G. & D. popular edition.

CHICKIE  
CHICKIE A SEQUEL  
SANDY

SHACKLED SOULS  
NORA LEE  
JERRY

### THE NOVELS OF VIDA HURST

These are swiftly moving, keenly written stories of real modern girls.

GREATER LOVE    BIG GAME  
SONIA                DIANA  
SEQUEL TO SONIA



---

GROSSET & DUNLAP - Publishers - NEW YORK

---